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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

The Wilderness Solo: Solitude and Re-Creation

by

Julie Morrison

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Master of Education

IN

Counselling Psychology

Department of Educational Psychology

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring, 1986

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DATED April 18, 1986 1986

God got so stuffy squeezed into a church.
Only out in the open was there room for Him.
He was like a great breathing among the trees
. . . He filled all the universe.

(Emily Carr, 1966)

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Wilderness Solo: Solitude and Re-Creation submitted by Julie Morrison in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Counselling Psychology.

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Supervisor

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Date April 18, 1986

ABSTRACT

The intent of this study was to explore, from a phenomenological perspective, what happens when one spends time alone in the wilderness. Do certain common themes exist for people who choose to be alone in an environment which virtually returns them to their "roots"? Can this type of experience be therapeutic?

The persons involved in this study agreed to help me explore these questions by spending three to four days alone in the wilderness. Through diaries, a tape recorder and art materials, the 'co-researchers' described their experiences as they unfolded.

Through their descriptions I was allowed to enter the life worlds of the soloists and to discover the common themes which reveal the essence of the wilderness solo. These themes included freedom from routine and distractions (simplicity), increased spontaneity in terms of personal expression and bodily rhythms, attunement to senses and nature, a sense of pride in accomplishment, an increased appreciation for relationships with other people, and a reliance on humor.

As these themes emerged it became apparent that there were other, more subtle "processes" occurring. Each person was confronted with boredom and personal fears. The exploration of these fears led the soloists on an inward journey that resembled a vacillating spiral--eventuating in a deeper understanding of themselves in relation to their "worlds." The solos had a meditative quality which enabled the soloists to become conscious-in-the-moment and to rely on personal intuition.

The interplay of these phenomena engenders an intimacy with the self, the soul. An intimacy which allows one to turn inward, in order that there may be a sharing outward. An expression of the self-being-in-the-world.

There are no definitive statements resulting from this study, rather, ideas to ponder when thinking of the wilderness as a potentially healing environment. Factors the study brought forth as worthy of consideration are safety, individual willingness and readiness, short-term versus long-term effects and personal life circumstance. The therapy potential of the wilderness solo is enhanced by the leader's experience and personal commitment. The leader becomes a guide and is thus obliged to examine his or her role in the exploration.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To help the reader understand the basic question which is explored in this thesis, I shall begin by evoking some images of persons embedded in nature . . . and in some ineffable way responding to her call.

I am lulled into reverie by the pulse of the wind caressing the trees. The shadows of the evening sun climb to the tops of the trees and bring with it the colours of twilight on the nearby slope. The birds chant their goodnight melodies, and soon, from the burrows of the earth, the nocturnal creatures will stir. Once again the dance of the sun and the whispering of the wind bring their gentle reminder that night follows day follows night.

Such a contrast this life away from the hustle and bustle of city traffic--where the siren on the freeway replaces the howl of the coyote. Every year as the snow begins to melt and the heat of the spring sun draws fresh buds from the earth I am beckoned to the country. My hibernation is over. Like a bear crawling out of her winter den I crave the sumptuous smells of spring; to once again feel my bare feet moistened by the morning dew. Awakened by the birds chanting their uniqueness, and a curious bumblebee exploring the nooks of my camp, I look through the opening of the tipi at the clouds meandering across the

blue sky. I rise and open the flap to the east and am greeted by the warmth of the sunshine on my bare skin. Another day begins. . . .

The cities empty on weekends. The parklands are inundated by trails of cars and flocks of people. The rivers and streams take on a new form as fishermen explore the banks seeking the fish-filled pools. Further downstream a lone person stares blankly into the moving water--entranced by her own thoughts and illusions. On a nearby hillside a child sneaks up on a butterfly basking in the sun. Hikers become overwhelmed by the rich smells of the pine forest and the crystalline cobwebs sparkling in the sun after an afternoon shower.

As evening approaches, the reverent stargazer wonders at the significance of the ring around the moon, which the coyotes so melodiously serenade. The crackling of fires can be heard amidst laughter and talk, reflection and silence. Their glow provides warmth and company to those in need. As the weekend ends, the valleys empty and the trails of cars return to the city. The squirrels and the jays scamper to remove the traces of their human visitors.

On a hillside overlooking the Great Plains a lone visitor remains. She marvels at the beauty that surrounds her. A gentle waterfall trickles its way down to the prairie, giving life to everything in its path. Eventually it will join the great river flowing eastward toward the city. As the twilight descends, the mountains become a silhouette against a darkening blue sky. The lone visitor recedes to the comfort of her fire.

What is this person experiencing as she looks out over the valley and as she burrows into her tent for the night? What brings her here to

be alone for four days with only herself as company? And what of the lone fisherman standing on an outcrop of rocks for hours on end? What is his experience? What brings him back to this same spot every year? These are questions I ask myself. What is it that draws people from the comfort of their homes to join with nature? Does the wilderness have a special significance, a special meaning for these people? Do two people, alone on a certain spot experience similar thoughts, sensations, emotions and visions? What is the core, or essence of each person's experience? These are questions which pique a deep interest in me, and on which I am choosing to focus my research.

It seems appropriate at this point to describe myself and what brings me to explore the essence of one's experience while alone in the wilderness. Given the nature of my topic and the methodology (that I will explain in the next section) it is unavoidable that I will become intimately bound in my research. The questions I am asking--questions that I will be presenting to co-researchers--are sparked by my own intense love for and gravitation towards the wilderness. I often describe myself as one who "seeks the best" from both worlds--the city and the country. It is a striving which I do not totally understand. At various, and often regular points in my life, I find myself living in the city in order to pursue my academic interests. Usually, by mid-winter I begin to feel cramped in the corridors and classrooms, wistfully fantasizing about standing on top of a mountain or daydreaming

by the side of a fire. And so each summer for the last ten years I have lived outdoors--either in my tipi, through outdoor-related jobs, or by wilderness tripping.

My relationship to the wilderness began at a fairly young and impressionable age. Having just turned eighteen I was overcome by an insatiable curiosity and desire to explore New Zealand and Australia. Mustering courage, and led by a naive faith, I found myself on a 70-mile stretch of secluded beach in the north island of New Zealand. Alone, barefoot, and foodless, I began a trek which changed my life. Perhaps it was the sound of the waves, or the merging of the sand, water, and sky in the horizon; I am still not sure. An emptying took place, and then a re-filling. I felt very alone (I knew only one person in the country and I did not know where she was) and yet very much "a part of" something greater. I continued my journey for a year and a half before returning to Canada to pursue a formal education.

It seems that many of my choices in life have been made on the basis of such naive faith. My decision to acquire a B.A. in Recreation was sparked by a similar trust, and an interest in pursuing the academic elements of wilderness recreation. While trekking in New Zealand I acquired a dream of working in the wilderness with troubled youth. At the time it seemed to be the perfect way to merge my work with my play (again, another way to "bridge" two worlds). I explored this dream and lifestyle for a few years and once again found myself searching. My experience with delinquent youth taught me that the human process of self-questioning can create much unsettled-ness. During this experience questions such as "What am I doing? Who am I? What is my purpose in

life, or do I have one? What does all of this mean anyhow?" began to resurface for me. As my dreams became reality I recognized that total immersion into a wilderness lifestyle was denying me certain other needs (such as relationships and intellectual development). It was no longer my "play."

My current involvement in Educational Psychology provides me the opportunity to merge my interests in wilderness recreation and psychology. I view this choice not so much as a change in direction from my earlier path, but rather as a way to more deeply explore questions such as "What is one's experience of being alone in the wilderness? Is there a purpose to this experience? Can the wilderness be a catalyst in the process of self-exploration?"

The philosophy of existentialism with its emphasis on understanding the nature of humanity's existence is a significant guiding force for me. The philosophy is allowing me to crystallize, to clarify my personal approach to counselling. I am realizing that the "heart" of my approach, whether I am counselling a troubled teenager or talking with a friend, is to first understand, as well as I can, the core of each person's experience. I believe that as two people embark on a mutual search for understanding the path will unfold spontaneously and with clarity.

The methodology of phenomenology most closely resembles this mutual search, which is the process of acquiring a deeper understanding of another's experience. In so doing, it brings us together as human beings, sharing our lives at this special time. It is this sharing, the

kindred sparks of life so essential for growth, which so deeply moves me and provides the impetus for my current research.

I view this searching process as a spiral winding its way inward, deeper and deeper, spurred by the circular interchange of two persons sharing and exploring. With the help of the other, layers are shed and the core, the essence of one's being-in-the-world is revealed. In order to reveal this essence one must be willing to look deep within. And as one begins the inward exploration, the spiral motions outward, leaping to new planes of understanding when broader horizons are illuminated.

This process, which evolves as mutual understanding, is spawned by periods of questioning. It may be that questions simply create more questions, so that just as we think we have an answer, another question emerges. This leads me to wonder if it is the (ongoing) process of questioning rather than the finiteness of the answer that ultimately provides the key to understanding another's experience. If this is the case, then the journey is essentially more important than the "destination."

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to question, a quest for understanding. A quest that will take my co-researchers and myself on a journey, delving into the experience of being alone in the wilderness. My first task as a researcher is to choose a technique or methodology which will help me to gain access to this phenomenon of being alone in the wilderness.

The methodology I am choosing utilizes the technique of acquiring descriptions. "The term descriptive is used to refer to a group of research endeavors in the human sciences which focus on describing the basic structures of lived experience" (Polkinghorne, 1983:203).

> One must begin with naive description. The discipline enters in when one has to analyze what has been described. . . . From a phenomenological perspective description or language is access to the world of the describer. Descriptions of course, can be better or worse or even enigmatic, but they always reveal something of the world of the describer, even if it is only the fact of an enigmatic world. The task of the researcher is to let the world of the describer, or more concretely, the situation as it exists for the subject reveal itself through the description in an unbiased way. Thus it is the meaning of the situation as it exists for the subject that descriptions yield (Giorgi, 1971:74).

I asked six people to be my co-researchers in this quest for meaning. Each person volunteered to spend three or four days alone in the wilderness. I left the choice of location and circumstances for each solo to the individual, since it is my assumption that the term wilderness means something different to each person. Each soloist was

given a personal journal, tape recorder, drawing instruments, and was asked to "Describe your experience of being alone in the wilderness over the next few days and nights."

> This description is as general as it is because phenomenology wants to exclude nothing that can appear and on the other hand, include only that which in fact appears precisely as it presents itself. This strict point of departure is adhered to because man can only speak of that which appears to someone's stream of consciousness or experience. The minimum condition for the study of anything is that it be present to someone's consciousness (Giorgi, 1971:83).

This phenomenological method of description is "a method that remains with human experience as it is experienced, one which tries to sustain contact with experience as it is given" (Valle, 1978:53).

> The existential phenomenological way of doing social psychology begins by asking subjects (or oneself) to describe their experience and actions with respect to a given theme. . . . This theme names the psychological process, called 'psychological phenomenon' or 'phenomenon under study' (Valle, 1978:199).

Through this process of describing one's experience as s/he lives it . . .

> we can let the phenomena speak for themselves, and when we do, we discover that whatever appears suggests in its very appearance something more which does not appear, which is concealed. For this reason, a phenomenon can be said to contain significances since it refers beyond what is immediately given (Giorgi, 1970:151).

It is these descriptions of each person's solo which enable me as a researcher to more deeply understand each person's experience. According to Heidegger

> the phenomenologist, in seeking to understand the phenomenon by staying with it, thinks meditatively about its meaning. The phenomenologist is satisfied with his descriptive method which provides him with identification of psychological phenomena because, at the core of his approach towards himself, the world, and others he is content to understandingly dwell" (Valle, 1978:68).

Since "phenomenology depends almost exclusively upon the power of language for communication" (Giorgi, 1971:100), I think it is important that each co-researcher's expression be as spontaneous and prolific as possible. My task as a researcher is to obtain descriptions that represent, as closely as possible, the actual experience without having been there inside each person as s/he lives the experience.

To obtain these descriptions I provided each person with a journal, small tape recorder, and drawing/writing instruments. The journal covers are hand-made from leather and personally inscribed--they are returned as a gift and souvenir of the experience. I felt this touch would help to personalize the writing; to make it each person's 'own,' rather than have it be only for the purpose of the study. The tape recorder and drawing instruments were provided as means for alternate forms of expression, perhaps as a diversion from boredom or an appeal to other more creative modes.

Having obtained these descriptions my next task is to decipher the underlying meaning of each person's recordings. "The value of the phenomenological approach is the direct access it provides to meaning by interrogating the qualitative aspects of the phenomenon" (Giorgi, 1971:101). This questioning involves much reflection and 'reading between the lines.'

> Indeed, if there is one word that most aptly characterizes phenomenology itself, then this word is thoughtfulness. . . . Thoughtfulness is described as a minding, a heeding, a caring attunement—a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life (van Manen, 1984:38).

This process of thoughtful reflection on one's descriptions in order to extract meaning is based on the assumption that

> experience is not a buzzing flux but a constituted meaningful and ordered understanding. The constitutive process may be termed a synthesizing activity of consciousness. This . . . refers to the way in which the spectrum of experience is organized into units and recognizable wholes. . . . Experience is built up through an activity of constitution along the lines of types (eide) or 'essential structures' (Polkinghorne, 1983:204).

If one's experience of being alone in the wilderness is not merely a "buzzing flux" of chaotic events, then what are some of these "essential structures" that exist for each person? As I sit here and reflect on my co-researchers going about their daily lives I wonder how their solo experiences might differ from their ordinary life circumstances. Certainly, because each person is alone for three or four days and in an unusual environment, this implies some difference from their usual lifestyles. How each person reacts to this 'difference' is a major point of this research. Is it possible that everyone experiences something similar when alone in the wilderness? If so, what is it that evokes these similarities? By delineating these similarities perhaps we can discover the "essential structures."

These similarities are revealed as themes throughout the descriptions. The purpose of this research is to find the "common themes in the written descriptions and to find language that captures these themes, or what some prefer to call structures" (Barrett & Beekman, 1984:5). In order to capture these themes or structures the

researcher must ask What does this experience mean for each person? because . . .

> meaning and structure are one. In fact one can think of structure as pre-reflective, embodied meaning. . . . Structure arises out of the between. It emerges from the dialogue which the subject and his or her world co-constitute. . . . Structures are not initially reflective phenomena--they are lived before being grasped in reflective awareness. . . . Structures are considered to be emergent phenomena which dynamically unfold into being (Valle, 1978:159).

Through description, structure and meaning unfold, and eventually evolves as understanding of the true essence of one's experience. This word essence should not be mystified.

> By 'essence' we do not mean some kind of mysterious entity or discovery, nor some ultimate core or residue of meaning. Rather, the term 'essence' is probably best understood as a linguistic construction: a description of a phenomenon. A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way (van Manen, 1984:41).

It may seem at this point that we have come full-circle. This is precisely the nature of my research. This grasping of the nature and significance of an experience requires that we intuit, go beyond the words themselves. My task as a researcher is to discover the meaning within the descriptions of my co-researchers, and in so doing, tap the essence of their experience. Their ongoing descriptions as they live through their wilderness solo experiences are meant to provide me with a view of their pre-reflective life-worlds. "By reflecting in a methodical way on experiences themselves, one can bring to light the previously hidden eidetic (having to do with eidos) activity" (Polkinghorne, 1983:42). Through methodical reflection, their life-worlds are "brought to the level of reflective awareness, where it

manifests itself as psychological meaning" (Valle, 1978:17). Our understanding deepens as meaning reveals essence reveals meaning.

Rationale for the use of the solo

The idea for my research first came to me during a two-week hiking trip through Willmore, Jasper and Mount Robson Parks. I had been toying with many ideas up to this point, but could not seem to gain the clarity I needed to begin my study. It still amazes me how, seemingly out of nowhere, my direction became so obvious. The day was warm and a crystal blue sky was reflecting on the stream from which I was drinking. On my right was the Rock Wall. It was so majestic, towering above me, extending for miles. It seemed to be protecting the pristine wilderness from the encroachment of weekend recreationists with all of their clanking paraphernalia. I felt very alone at that moment, and very possessive of this beautiful scenery surrounding me. For a split second I experienced a sense of overwhelming joy and sadness combined. It was not until I started walking that I was able to put words to my experience. I was thinking about the intensity of my feelings and wondered if other people in this valley had experienced a similar sensation. I began to reflect on my thesis-to-be, and as I did, two things became very clear. I want to gain a deeper understanding of what the wilderness means to me and others who are drawn to it. And I want to enjoy the process of the study. What this clearly meant to me was that the process of the research is equally as important as the content. In other words, I wanted to devise a project that would be interesting

for both myself and the persons I ask to join in my study. The idea of having people go out on a three- to four-day solo seemed to be a perfect way of creating an experience in order to study it. This idea blended well with my growing interest in phenomenological research which . . .

> is the study of lived experience. To say the same thing differently: phenomenology is the study of the life-world--the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or theorize about it. Phenomenology aims to come to a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our . . . experiences (van Manen, 1984:37).

Asking people to describe their experience of being alone in the outdoors enables me to explore and expand my combined interests in outdoor recreation and psychology. The solo creates this life-world and simultaneously provides me with a concrete way to study and to understand one's experience.

> Since the life-world is the ground for all science and systematic knowledge, psychology conceived as a human science must always stay in touch with this inexhaustible source of all data. In other words the scientific expressions of psychology and the ordinary expression of the life-world must stay in constant dialogue (Giorgi, 1971:99).

This idea that "time is lived before it is thought, and it is this living that we must strive to bring to expression" (Valle, 1978:141) provides the underpinnings for my research. An ongoing description of one's experience while alone in the wilderness provides an ideal way to bypass the clutter and distortion that often evolves from prolonged self-reflection and self-analysis of past experiences. Being alone creates the milieu in which one may spontaneously and consciously reflect on his or her experience as it unfolds. The environment of the wilderness creates a situation in which "the more primitive grasp of the world in terms of its meanings for the perceiver's ongoing involvements,

e.g. his affective situation" (Valle, 1978:105) become readily available. The wilderness situation allows for direct contact with "pathic perception or sensing (that) gives the subject a world that is immediate or concrete" (Valle, 1978:104). Attending to these pathic perceptions or "physiognomic" dimensions of an experience allows the "phenomenological pursuit of the human experience . . . to reveal that experience in its depth, its structure; its contextualization; its interpretation" (Giorgi, 1971:285).

Selection of Co-Researchers

The next phase of my research involves the selection of persons to help me with my study.

> The point of phenomenological research is to 'borrow' other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole experience (van Manen, 1984:55).

Considering that my primary objective is to gain a mutual understanding of each person's experience, it seems inappropriate to refer to these people as subjects. I prefer to call them co-researchers because of the importance to my study of our relationship.

> The face-to-face encounter provides the richest data source of the human science researcher seeking to understand human structures of experience. This interaction takes place in the context of a relationship. The more comfortable and trusting a person feels with the researcher the more open and giving he or she will be concerning his or her own experiences (Polkinghorne, 1983:267).

This emphasis on the relationship between myself and my co-researchers adds a challenging and interesting dimension which satisfies my objective to make this a mutual quest for understanding. The more

honest, spontaneous and full of depth the descriptions, the more likely the essence of each experience will be revealed.

As

> we gather other people's experiences . . . it allows us, in a vicarious sort of way to become more experienced ourselves. We are interested in the particular experiences . . . since it allows us to become 'in-formed' shaped, or enriched by this experience so as to better be able to render the full significance of its meaning (van Manen, 1984:56).

This adds an important dimension because "the 'generating data' part of the research is an educational development for the researcher" (van Manen, 1984:50). This necessitates that I as a researcher be open to changes in my own attitudes as a result of the encounter between myself and my co-researchers.

> Indeed, when I relate interhumanly to another . . . I am open to an encounter with the other as a unique individual. I do not know where this encounter will lead. In just this way an encounter can break any preconception that I have as to the character of this person (Bakan, 1984:76).

Delineating Presuppositions

As my encounters with my co-researchers allow me to get to know them as individuals I begin to understand what their solo experiences have meant to them. For a mutual understanding to take place however, it is necessary that I as the researcher, be willing to examine what are my own presuppositions that might distort or cloud my understanding. It is through the elucidation of these presuppositions (i.e., bringing them to conscious awareness) that I can be more fully open in my encounters with each individual. This open-ness however, implies that I may have to change my personal biases if their experiences do not support these

presuppositions. In doing this type of research I take the risk that my expectations may not be met.

> The presence of the bias limits the generality of the data, but this is precisely when a scientific perspective would want this information. . . . By means of relating the results of a study with the biases (or perspectives) of a researcher, one would be able to circumscribe the context within which certain results would be valid (Giorgi, 1970:169).

> The major protection against bias is for the viewpoint itself to be made explicit so that its validity may be circumscribed. It is not the sheer presence of bias that vitiates data, it is the extension of limited biases to situations where they are not relevant and thus they lose their fruitfulness. Precisely because man is always in a limited situation, in a perspective, we feel that an engaged attitude which acknowledges such a perspective is a more accurate description than an 'objective' one, and thus we feel that a more accurate understanding of why research situations have validity may be achieved (Giorgi, 1970:189).

> By explicating my presuppositions . . .

> I delineate and make explicit the intention that guides the elaboration of my data. By means of this procedure I am able to communicate to other researchers the attitude I assume with respect to the descriptions. These clarifications take place for my consciousness as a researcher and are the consequence of deepening the descriptions rather than extrapolating beyond them (Giorgi, 1971:78).

> According to Polkinghorne (1983:28)

> the human scientist is a human being who is affected like everyone else, by the circumstances of his setting. Dilthey saw this as an advantage, not a disadvantage to be overcome, because a researcher gives meaning to his own experience through the organizing process. These processes then are not abstract, as a relationship is in the physical realm; they are experienced by the researcher and are part of his own interpretation of life. The processes themselves are used in the researcher's activity to gain knowledge.

Serious interrogation of presuppositions ultimately provide the possibility for more unbiased information. "What we implicitly view as the final meaning or value of our research will influence how we approach an investigated topic" (Valle, 1978:55). A comparison of the

descriptions among other researchers would likely produce divergent interpretations because each person would be viewing the data from a different perspective.

> Consequently, the control comes from the researcher's context or perspective of the data. Once the context and intention becomes known, the divergence is usually intelligible to all even if not universally agreeable. Thus, the chief point to be remembered with this type of research is not so much whether another position with respect to the data could be adopted (this point is granted beforehand), but whether a reader, adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it (Giorgi, 1971:96).

The presentation of my own presuppositions follows the same procedure I use to delineate the structure or meaning of each co-researcher's experience. This meaning or essence is revealed by extracting the themes within the descriptions.

> Phenomenological themes are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus experienced as meaningful wholes. Themes are the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through. It is by the light of these themes that we can navigate and explore such universes (van Manen, 1984:59).

My presuppositions are the themes I hope to see emerge from the descriptions of my co-researchers. It is these themes which will guide my interpretations. As mentioned earlier however, my interrogation must go beyond these themes. Being aware of what I expect to emerge is the first step. Being sensitive to diverging themes results from disciplined and methodical reflection.

> It is to the extent that my experiences could be our experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of his. To be aware of the structure of my own experience of this phenomenon may provide me with clues for orienting myself to the phenomenon and then to all the other stages of phenomenological research.

> . . . Phenomenology always addresses any phenomenon as a possible human experience; this is why phenomenological descriptions have a universal (intersubjective) character (van Manen, 1984:52).

In order to give the reader a 'feel' for this process of deriving (intersubjective) themes I will present a short description of my own. The reader is asked to keep in mind that "a phenomenological theme is much less a singular statement (concept or category) than an actual description of the structure of a lived experience. . . . A thematic phrase only serves to point at, to allude to, an aspect of the phenomenon" (van Manen, 1984:60).

The following is an excerpt from my personal journal. Through the process of 'inner dialogue' I describe what I get from being alone in the wilderness. Through meditative reflection I derive what I consider to be the underlying themes. Assuming that there exists a certain universality or intersubjectivity to all experience, I will be particularly sensitive to these themes emerging in others' descriptions.

Reflecting on Reflecting . . .

So tell me, what brings me here today, to sit on top of this ridge overlooking the expanse of trees, to feel the gentle breeze against my skin. To listen to the silence--the delicate whisper of the wind in the leaves. And the flies buzzing around, drinking from the moisture on my skin, drawn out by the warmth of the sun. What draws me to make a study, a university thesis from this? What do I hope to get out of this anyhow?

When I ask these questions I become aware that my intentions for this study are intimately bound to my expectations. My presuppositions, the themes I hope to see emerge for people, are the themes which I experience when I'm alone for three or four days, with only the wind and the bugs and the deer and the coyotes as company. Ah, yes! And I guess I cannot forget my trusting canine companions Amisk and Gypsy.

When I came from the city last evening I went for a long walk through the fields, playing my tin flute. Came back to my camp and sat up on the ridge, eating cherries left as a gift by my last co-researcher finishing her solo. Watching the moon peek its way over the horizon. And the stars, and the clouds . . . I became entranced by the beauty.

And here it is already--midday. My process of re-balancing, re-healing, re-creation has begun once again. I sat by the fire in the tipi 'till the 'wee' hours of this morning--reading. I arose this morning, a leisurely breakfast. Listened to the recording of my co-researcher, or ally as she referred to herself in her journal. I played my tin flute and danced to my own music, . . . and here I am, basking in the sun, writing about my experience.

Here I am, alone, in my own piece of this beautiful wilderness, I wonder if others experience what I experience?

I come here to heal, to re-balance, to re-connect with my inner rhythms. The first thing that begins to happen is in my nose--my sense of smell returns. When I'm in the city I find that my senses, bombarded by stimulation, begin to retreat, block themselves.

Overall, I would say that my primary expectation is that other people, seeking aloneness in the wilderness, will also experience this re-balancing, re-attunement to their senses. I interpret this process as healing because of the peacefulness . . . permeating through my cells. Surely nobody can deny that a body 'in tune' with its natural rhythms is a body capable of healing itself. Is it not the constant imbalance and avoidance of our inner needs for peaceful relaxation that eventually creates dis-ease?

When I leave the city and retreat to my solo spot in the country, I leave behind the constant bombardment, the assault of my senses. I leave behind the multi-layered distractions which constantly tease me out of myself. Ring-ring, knock-knock, vroom-vroom, gotta go here, gotta go there. When I'm alone in my house, I can take the phone off the hook, but there is always the possibility for someone to drop by, or for me to make up a need to do errands.

When I'm alone my movements become a sort of natural meditation. I feel free to shed my clothes and experience my body without the usual masks. This re-attunement with my natural rhythms allows me to move uninhibited throughout the day. It's a cyclical process. The more spontaneously I am able to move the more in touch I become with the inner rhythm and the more spontaneous becomes the inner rhythm.

Being out here allows me to leave behind my usual sense of time. Out here the sun, making its predictable path across the sky, is my clock. Right now it's a little west of mid-way between the horizons, which means it's shortly after noon. So what? I have no appointments to make. I have some chores which I must attend to--sometime. And as

the sun begins to bake my skin I think I'll wander down to the river for a dip. And in this heat I don't feel hungry. I suppose if I were working right now at a job that gave me an hour for lunch I would likely be eating, even though I might not be hungry. Ah, yes, this time alone definitely resembles a holiday. A time for recreation. Re-creation. Not having to get up at a certain time in the morning to go or do whatever I need to do in my normal life frees me to establish my own sleeping patterns. I can snooze in the mid-afternoon or stay up all night to greet the morning sun.

And I suppose there are times of loneliness and boredom. Times when walking at dusk playing my tin flute seems almost mournful. It would be nice to have some company. Someone with whom to share my thoughts, my feelings, my dreams, my fantasies. As much as I love my retreats to my wilderness, I always look forward to my contact with people. It is these retreats which paradoxically, clarify my need for people. When I return to the city I selectively choose my contacts based on my needs--which I seem to be more in contact with. After three or four days alone I become somewhat possessive of my personal time and space and do not wish it to dissipate through contact which is unmeaningful. After being alone and having to make conversation with myself I begin to discover my most intimate friend. Me. As I discover my 'intimate friend' I wish to share her with someone who truly wants to get to know her. The essence of meaningful contact.

These are my themes. Healing--a re-balancing, a re-attunement to my senses, my bodily rhythms, a natural meditation. Freedom from daily

distractions, a retreat, simplicity. A change in my usual way of perceiving time. A time to reflect on my place and meaning in my world, perspective.

These themes, based on my own experience, provide the framework upon which to continue my research.

> The work of a descriptive psychologist differs from the work of, for example, a bird watcher: the bird watcher works within an already developed classification system, and he has only to identify the category to which a bird belongs; but the descriptive psychologist does not have an already developed system and so must identify the basic categories themselves and describe their structural features. After this basic work is done, then it is possible to determine in which category a particular experience belongs (Polkinghorne, 1983:38).

Having identified my own categories, or themes, my task as researcher is to examine the descriptions of my co-researchers' solos. Through methodical reflection their descriptions allow me to enter their lifeworlds and to distill what I perceive to be the underlying themes.

> The nature of the lifeworld experienced as the stream of consciousness makes it difficult to provide precise statements about its contents and structures. As a reality originating in interacting patterns, it does not show up with clear outlines as physical objects do, and thus the researcher finds it difficult to produce the kind of knowledge that gains complete intersubjective agreement (Polkinghorne, 1983:240).

For this reason it is necessary to verify these themes with each co-researcher. This will take the form of a follow-up interview during which we discuss my reflections on their descriptions. In this way "the initial description given in an open-ended situation by a (co-researcher) is transformed by the researcher in dialogue with the (co-researcher) according to the aims/intentions of the experimenter's research" (Giorgi, 1971:104).

> Ultimately, for the researcher's interpretation to be valid it must, at least, be a recognizable reality of those in whom the interpretation is made. Thus, part of the validation process is to verify an interpretation by opening it to a critical analysis of those persons . . . who are the subject of the interpretation (Sullivan, 1980:67).

By means of dialogue, the researcher and co-researcher collaborate to more deeply understand the meaning within the descriptions. This dialogue is a . . .

> shared exploration, mostly of the world of the person sought out but including a great deal of give and take. It requires in other words a combination of humane spontaneity and professional discipline (Sullivan, 1980:58).

"It aims at producing not publicly shared objective knowledge but intersubjectively shared understandings not discovered by individuals searching in the world alone" (Sullivan, 1980:49).

> The process of understanding is a movement from the first prejudgmental notion of the meaning of the whole, in which the parts are understood, to a change in the sense of the meaning of the whole because of the confrontation with the detailed parts of the (descriptions). Dilthey called this movement from whole to parts to whole the "hermeneutic circle." The movement is not really a circle, however it is more of a spiral in which each movement from part to whole increases the depth of understanding (Polkinghorne, 1983:226).

This process of verification--understanding--is not meant "to close the subject, but to open it further" (Giorgi, 1971:280). Because of the open-ended nature of the research design, closure is allowed to be made by the co-researchers themselves. "When the closure is accomplished, data are obtained, but now they are obtained from a perspective that includes the (co-researcher's) more spontaneous participation" (Giorgi, 1970:203).

Goal of this Research

My main goal or intention is to more fully understand the nature or essence of the wilderness solo experience. My primary preconception is that the wilderness solo has the potential to be a healing experience for those involved. I will be interpreting the descriptions of my co-researchers in light of this bias. The process of extracting themes from the descriptions and verifying these through dialogue with my co-researchers, becomes especially important because of individual connotations of the term healing. My task as a researcher however, is to not be blinded by my own preconceptions. Although my interpretations will be biased by what I hope to find I must be sensitive to other, unexpected themes which will emerge. These themes viewed in context of my original intention, will form the basis of the Discussion and Action Imperative. The Action Imperative will "form recommendations that might lead to more possibilities for human autonomy, a better situation for those on whom a decision is to be visited" (Barritt & Beekman, 1984:15). More specifically, I hope to come up with recommendations which can guide my future involvement with the wilderness solo. In my attempt to combine Outdoor Recreation and Psychology, this research will hopefully give me some insights into the use of the solo for the purposes of therapy in the wilderness.

The reader is asked to keep in mind however, that I am not seeking clear-cut, black and white statements about the use of the solo for specific wilderness therapy purposes. I am seeking a deeper

understanding of the experience itself. This understanding will ultimately influence my future actions.

> Phenomenological research is a poetizing activity. . . . As in poetry it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary of a phenomenological study. To summarize a poem in order to present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result. The poem is the thing (van Manen, 1984:39).

In the quest for deeper understanding, you, the reader, are invited to make your own interpretations.

Reflections on Co-Researchers' Descriptions

As I sit here in the corner of my wall tent, nestled against the warm stove, sipping my morning coffee, I am once again drawn into reverie by the cyclical whisper of the wind. As she caresses the trees, droplets of water from last night's rain patter on the canvas. Summer is slipping away; the cool mornings signal this change in season. The sun peeks above the horizon much later now, slowly warming the earth and transforming the heavy dew into mist. From the opening of my nest I notice the colors changing. The beautiful pink roses have become hips, a sign that fall is near. The goldenrod, laden with bumblebees extracting nectar for the approaching winter, is changing from golden to brown. The leaves, once a lush green, are now spotted with yellow. The earth, in her gentle and subtle way, is ending one phase and entering a new. A time of reflection welcomes the oncoming hibernation. As the blossoms wither and the animals begin preparation for their winter retreat I am reminded that this is a time for reflection and completion. Another phase begins.

I am reflecting on each of my co-researchers and wondering about the paths each of them is choosing to follow at this moment. Many weeks have passed since their solos and without doubt, each person is engaged in the changing dimensions of their lives. I have been reading their descriptions and reflecting meditatively on each of their solo experiences. I view these descriptions as gifts. Each one represents an invitation for me to enter a small segment of their life-worlds, their realities, enticing me to join them for what seems an interminable length of time. In their own unique ways, through their descriptions of their solos, I feel as though I have been allowed to enter the private recesses of their lives. As I read through each of the journals, look at the drawings, and listen to their tapes, I become entranced. In many ways I feel that I was there, experiencing with each of them, as their lives unfolded.

CHAPTER III

THE SOLO EXPERIENCES

As a researcher, my aim is to summarize or draw out the essential meaning of each person's experience as it has been presented to me. Since physical reality cannot permit me to enter totally into each person's life-world, I am limited, by means of meditative reflection to interpret each experience as I see it. Following, are the reconstructions which hopefully will provide the reader with a feel for the essence of each co-researcher's solo. As a prelude to my reconstructions I am including a brief description of each person, their background information and personal expectations upon entering the solo. The journals and transcriptions offer an extensive and rich view of each person's microcosm. The reconstruction of these experiences, attempts to tap this richness in a systematic and creative way--condensing the material into a manageable form while maintaining the uniqueness of each person's expression. This process has evolved naturally from the research design and unfolds in the following way. The reconstructions follow the process of 1) reading through the journals and listening to the tapes in order to get an initial feel for each experience, 2) transcribing the tapes, reading through the written material and underlining significant phrases which jump out at me, 3) re-writing these phrases in sequence and commenting on them, 4) re-reading these significant phrases and formulating a meaning or theme for each phrase,

5) identifying redundancies in themes, 6) clustering the themes, identifying patterns, 7) summarizing and interpreting significant themes, and 8) presenting this reconstruction with actual excerpts from the descriptions.

The Solo Experience of Darren

Darren is a 15-year-old, tall, blonde young man with an athletic build and a friendly demeanor. I met Darren at his home in Edmonton, two weeks prior to his solo. I contacted him on the recommendation of a friend who indicated that he had expressed an interest in doing a solo. She described him as a ". . . fairly together young man who would probably benefit from such an experience." Our initial meeting was quite brief--we met for a coffee and milk at the A & W. Darren described himself as being very involved in athletics, and performing in the 50-60% range in his school subjects. He claimed his poorest subject is English and, although he has difficulty with writing, he enjoys it. He expressed an interest in becoming a physical education teacher. Darren recently moved to Edmonton to live with his mother and two young sisters. He claims that his desire for ". . . more opportunity, and more girls to choose from" inspired his move to the city.

When I asked Darren what appealed to him about doing a wilderness solo he replied that the idea sounded kind of neat and that he would like to give it a try. He said that by living on his father's farm he spent a lot of time outdoors but had never spent time alone in the mountains. He mentioned that keeping a journal, doing some writing would be fun and good practise. He described his ideal setting as

". . . by a river with rapids, somewhere in the mountains." Having developed a good feeling for Darren, i.e., confidence in his ability to successfully manage the challenge, we agreed on the solo dates.

We drove to a relatively isolated area, on the edge of a creek midway between Hinton and Cadomin. Darren selected his solo-site on the basis of his ideal setting. For safety considerations I camped a quarter mile downstream and arranged to make visual checkups (a wave) twice a day. Darren left my campsite on Thursday afternoon, with all of his gear, and returned on Sunday afternoon. My reconstruction of Darren's experience follows.

Darren's solo experience seemed to unfold in waves--ebbs and flows, vacillations between an inner and outer experience. Darren strode away from my campsite looking very sure of himself--a young man off on an adventure. His initial descriptions were very positive. He was immediately taken in by the novelty and beauty of the environment, while at the same time attending to his safety and comfort needs:

> About the scenery. It's BEAUTIFUL! Everything is so green. I don't know why I ever moved to the city. . . . This is great. Right now the sun is going to bed and all I can hear is the river. . . . The tops of the trees are golden from the sun. . . . It's beautiful country here. . . . There's kinda trees falling down, and rocks . . . avalanche territory.

As darkness descended Darren's self-confidence began to wane, twinges of apprehension settled in.

> Hope there's no natural disasters happening tonight, like a forest fire--I don't want to get burnt. Hope the rock I have my food tied to stays put--I don't wanna go hungry. Hope this tent is rain resistant cause . . . looks like it's going to rain tonight.

As he focused on his external environment he was drawn out of his fears. At this point he began to allow himself pride in his accomplishments. The ebb and flow was beginning its course.

> The river's nice . . .rapids and everything. It's pretty neat. I like it. . . . I'm feeling rather proud of myself to tell the truth--built a fire. I never thought I could do that. . . . Even cooked some food . . . set up the tent. That was a feat in itself.

Darren's personal agenda to do some writing was becoming a reality. Writing was a pleasant pastime as well as a means by which to explore his feelings.

> Sitting here in my tent. Writing right now seems almost like watching T.V. . . . Got up kinda early this morning. Had to say goodbye to my brother. He's going to California for five weeks. Lucky little shit. Ah, that's alright . . . I'm stuck here all by myself having a whole bunch of fun. This is alright. I don't mind this a bit. Actually get to do a lot of writing.

Darren's first night alone in the wilderness turns out to be fairly traumatic because his fear keeps him awake. He writes and talks about his fear as he sits by his fire. This process,which diverts his wild imagination, has a calming effect. His fear dissipates as once again he focuses outward and inward.

> Julie I lied. I won't see you in the morning. I'm too scared to get to sleep . . . I find myself scared to death at night-time. So I made a fire . . . someone get me out of here. I'm bored, scared . . . wrote some more by the fire. It's really dark now. I'm confused . . . too many thoughts going through my mind right now. It's just kinda panic cause I seen a deer just before it got dark and where there's deers there's probably bears. . . . You hear a lot of things when you're alone. The river sounds like people talking. Stars are nice . . . writing keeps my mind off being scared. It's just that I can't see anything and I can't really hear anything because of the river and wind put together . . . just like being blind. Can't see or do anything but I'll live (yawn) . . . I'm scared now but in the morning I'll feel better.

By the next morning Darren is feeling much better. He comments again on the scenery and decides to explore the immediate area. His confidence is growing as he learns to cope with his fears. "I think I'll go to bed earlier today so I don't have to get all scared over nothing. Tonight will be easier. Tonight I'll know what to expect."

Having explored his fears, Darren is freed to enter a new phase. He begins to show signs of restlessness, and eventually boredom. His experience vacillates from inward thought to outward (environmental) observation.

> I'm finding that nothing to do with my spare time is not so bad because it gives me time to think about a lot of things: like me and my girlfriend, me moving to the city, my Dad and my little brother. . . . I just noticed some birds who are learning to fly.

Later that evening: "There's nothing really to do around here. I just kinda found out. Pretty bored. In fact, you could say extremely bored."

Darren experiences loneliness as boredom sets in. He is forced to go inward and to identify some of his most important needs. "Tonight now I feel I need someone to talk to, badly. I'm getting tired of expressing myself on paper. I need someone to talk to me. I need to be questioned on anything." In a sense, Darren begins his own process of values clarification--he re-assesses his priorities. "I'm feeling homesick I guess. Right now I could even stand my mom's singing . . . I wouldn't mind Ange playing the piano or coming into my room." He examines his current relationships and the meaning they have for him.

> I went and sat by the river after I fell asleep . . . did some thinking. Wrote a few more words down in the book. The book of life. Kept me sane over these last couple days. Wouldn't mind a little Eddie Murphy or Bill Cosby . . . all my idols. My Uncle

> Ed's pretty funny, too. I like hanging around with him. . . . I think some of the things I wrote to Debbie you could use too. Things I've realized about Debbie while I'm away from her. Things I've realized about my dad and how I grew pretty unsensitive. I talked to Debbie about what I'm feeling when I'm living at my house. Maybe make sure the kids understand that I'm not their father, I'm their brother. I thought a lot about talking to people. Talking. Communication is a necessary part of life. Make sure you put that in your report. Being a co-researcher I've found out that people need other people.

In his restlessness and boredom, Darren creatively discovers some simple pleasures to occupy his time.

> The avalanche territory, it's really very interesting. . . . I threw some rocks in the river, that was fun. . . . Playing with the birds. They'd come and eat right out of your hand. That was alright. . . . Ended up drawing a couple pictures. I think they look nice. Gives me something to do. I think the pictures say a lot of things in themselves because they're all about the river. I can see why cities are formed on rivers. People need rivers.

The discovery of these simple pleasures triggered an ability to explore each moment as it unfolded, to transcend the boredom and enter each moment.

Throughout the ebbs and flows that unfold for Darren, he always maintains a fairly constant connection with his body (image)--which appears to evolve with his experience.

> I just burned my finger and it hurts. I look pretty scruffy . . . someday I will bring Debbie up here in the sticks. Don't know if I want to wash my hair in the river, it seems pretty cold. . . . I described to Debbie some of the things I've done over the day. What I probably smell like.

I had the sense that Darren's self-image, with respect to his developing wilderness competencies, was changing.

> . . . hey, these are the things you have to do when you're an outdoorsman such as myself. . . . This morning I decided to be a little less woodsman type and get up after the birds. I think I might do some serious suntanning."

Darren's sense of time always remained important to him--although not necessarily in the typical clock sense. The intensity of his need to know the time was proportionate to his thoughts wandering back home.

> I don't even know what the date is. I know it's Saturday though. I can sense Saturday. Saturday is a day for partying . . . kept a pretty good track of time. Like day one, day two, day three, and tomorrow will be day four--ha ha! Yes.

As his solo progressed, Darren's boredom became almost oppressive. It was a real struggle for him to maintain a positive attitude towards his experience. He found respite both by going inward and projecting externally into his future. By going inward, and focusing on the high and low points, he finds resolution.

> All I can think about is getting back home. That's today. Some of the things I miss. It's pretty good when you can see the light at the end of the tunnel--you know that you're gonna be getting out . . . This is the most boring place in the world. Takes a lot of stamina to stay out here all this time, I think . . . I felt free and there was times when I wondered what this is all about . . . I didn't find it all that tough to do the solo. The only tough part really was missing familiar things like . . . stuff around the home. People doing certain things at certain times of the day. My little sister for instance. . . . I did a lot of writing . . . I don't know if I'd want to do another solo. I mean, I would have a better time if I was with, say Debbie. Alone in the wilderness. . . . I almost forget what it's like to have a conversation. . . . What I'm feeling now is a sense of accomplishment . . . I'm feeling proud of myself . . . it's given me a lot of time to think about some situations . . . No matter what I say the scenery is still a lot better than downtown Edmonton. I have to thank you. Because you gave me the opportunity to do something like this. It gave me a sense of accomplishment. Thank you. I'm excited about getting home. Ahh! A sigh of relief.

Darren's solo experience was characterized by a series of movements or waves. A vacillation--back and forth, inward and outward--which

allowed him to spiral towards a deeper understanding of his experience. Certain patterns emerged whereby, experiencing confusion, he would either retreat into himself or become distracted by things external to him. This movement, a type of distancing from the confusion, re-created a balance. Through this balancing process he was able to clear his confusion, thereby gaining a new perspective.

Certain patterns evolved throughout Darren's solo which exemplify this process. Beginning with the initial excitement or novelty, he begins to experience fear. As he focuses on this fear (goes inward) he is calmed. He is distracted by his environment (going outward) and begins to recognize his accomplishments (inward satisfaction). As he begins to understand his fears he becomes restless and bored (moving outward). Choosing to stay with his boredom, not packing up and leaving, he continues his solo through a progression of vacillations. The boredom forces him to be creative, both internally and externally. Internally, he sits, thinks and writes, and in the process, clarifies some important values (e.g. "People need other people). He makes some decisions about his future (e.g. "Make sure the kids understand I'm not their father") and finishes with a sense of pride in himself. Externally, Darren explored an alternate form of expression through drawing, and discovered some of the simple pleasures of nature (feeding the birds).

By reflecting on these patterns, and by relating them to the whole of his experience, several themes emerged. An understanding of these themes unraveled at that point, what I perceived to be the essence of

Darren's solo as he experienced it. To recapitulate, the themes that emerged were:

a sense of personal accomplishment.

an opportunity to confront his fears and to learn how to cope with these fears.

a time to explore and assess his life, his relationships, to clarify his values.

acknowledgement of his need for people.

a time to explore and express both the negative and positive aspects of an experience.

attunement/alertness towards nature. Elements (fire and water) can be comforting.

satisfaction from simple pleasures when usual distractions and routines are removed. This helps to create an awareness of the present moment.

attunement to body and adjustment of body image, getting in touch with natural rhythms.

change in time perspective.

Darren came strolling into my campsite emanating an air of joyous satisfaction. There was a deep sparkle in his eye as he announced with a smile "I've had enough of this."

Darren's Responses to the Reconstruction of his Solo

I met with Darren once again to have him read my reconstruction of his solo experience. I wanted his feedback to see if my comments and highlights were accurate. He said that he agreed with everything, especially his sense of accomplishment when it was over. His summary comments included the following.

> The solo allowed him to go with whatever his mind thought of. There was freedom from routine which allowed him to go with whatever happened.
>
> It allowed him to catch up on issues that needed to be dealt with, ". . . kind of another freedom, like you don't have to be worried about other problems that might arise."
>
> It allowed him to go deeper into personal and family issues such as ". . . my dad and my aunt . . . what's going to happen if I keep doing this or I don't do that."

Darren concluded by saying that if "it's too long, it's no good . . . I start to hate everything."

Another dimension which came up in our discussion was the importance of humor throughout his solo. Darren said that on numerous occasions he invented his own comic relief that provided a sanity break, or reality check for him. Indeed, he enacted a humorous roleplay on the tape recorder which I failed to include in my reflections. Because of this, I would like to add another theme that emerged. Humor,perhaps as a reality check, perhaps as an expression of creativity, perhaps undefinable, a category of its own.

The Solo Experience of Arlen

Arlen, a recent friend of mine, is a 28-year-old, colorful and bubbly woman with brown curly hair and a medium build. She radiates freshness and spontaneity through the deep glowing sparkle in her eyes. Her warm, friendly and mischievous grin invites a playful openness. Her unpretentious, flexible and gentle nature, as well as her willingness to share, creates an atmosphere of trust and comfort when it comes time to

explore the more serious aspects of life. Arlen divides her working time between being an actress and a secretary. She claims her love for acting challenges her to reveal her true self. "I'm so vulnerable when I'm on stage, and I love it."

Arlen's interest in being a co-researcher was sparked by her curiosity about the project. Her intrigue with being alone in the bush for a few days reflects an undeveloped childhood affinity for the outdoors.

At the age of 18 Arlen was drawn to the city, leaving her parents' home in the Ontario woods, to pursue her career in acting. Living a very active lifestyle, she envisioned her solo experience as a time to wind down, to regain a connection to nature. She expressed some fear about being alone in the outdoors and consequently chose my tipi camp as a safe environment in which to spend her time. The camp, one hour west of Edmonton, near the North Saskatchewan River, is in a small meadow amidst rolling hills and a thick deciduous forest. I escorted Arlen to the camp on Thursday morning. Soon after we arrived I sensed that she wanted to be alone. With her eyes wide open, I left her to her silence.

Like a child on a mission, Arlen delves into the land of simplicity to explore her complexities. A dichotomy. Seeker of wisdom and understanding versus seeker of creative expression. The philosopher versus the clown. Can one exist without the other? The solo is a dialogue of opposites which winds Arlen towards a deeper understanding of this ongoing conflict.

As I reflect on Arlen's journal I conjure an image of a hummingbird engulfed in a sea of fresh, brightly colored blossoms. Darting back and

forth from flower to flower she is gradually drawn in to taste the sweet nectar that lies deep within the buds. Through what initially appears as confusion, Arlen's personal agenda begins to unfold.

> I was intent on delving headfirst into the first experiences or sensations, panicking at the thought of losing any one of them. . . . I have been here for less than one minute and feel compelled to start. . . . fear of the unknown. I don't know what's around the corner so I won't look. The forest doesn't mind one way or another if I'm here. Unassuming. What a beautiful quality. If the body was free of Bull's Brand Steel Wool and wire mesh around our hearts then any feelings could enter and exit. Even the 'bad' feelings which I'm still not clear in my mind about. Is pain and anger bad? When it's rainy is it a 'bad' weekend? . . . this is going to be one long microcosm of me and my life and my thoughts. That bit about how I don't want to think is beeshit--and I want to be a great philosopher one day. . . . I love the flowers . . . they . . . are innocent and undemanding. So many contradictions. On the way out here I thought I wonder if I can get into my clown. Fear of stopping . . . taking a step back . . . a step forward . . . of being vulnerable . . . that's why everyone should be around children. Or clowns. They are total openness.

Attempting to follow a hummingbird is a beautiful but almost impossible process. The rhyme and reason to the course eludes even the most dextrous and discerning eye. Arlen hints at the dichotomy existing within her; the creative, expressive, vulnerable child versus the contemplative, wise, and calm philosopher. Arlen proceeds to use her solo as a time to explore and delineate important values. Her time in the wilderness provides the opportunity to approach her life from a different perspective--one that she strongly identified with as a child and hopes now to incorporate as an adult. Like a hummingbird Arlen follows her instincts. She uses her exploration of and re-aquaintance to nature as a grounding force, enabling her to explore the roots of her expression, her being.

> I felt like a gorbie at first. an alien. . . . When I was a secretary--yes, it's cold and trivial but I don't lose myself. I can't . . . Well you can fake it for awhile. Guess I'll go for a walk . . . right away I feel like I'm at home and I have a territory . . . it seems endless even though I know it isn't. It's a good feeling . . . that kind of forest enters through the eye and this kind through the soles of my feet. The souls of my feet . . . things are in their right place. Including me. . . . Though wilderness could easily surface the more primitive . . . the animal instincts . . . the unyielding urge to live. Are there suicides in the country? It all seems so foolish out here. Conditioning . . . why is it so hard to change? Does change denote personal previous error. Maybe people should play more games so that they get used to giving a wrong answer.

At this point Arlen seems to be tasting the various nectars available to her, deciding which ones to hone in on. Her playful, inquisitive, childlike nature draws her out again. The need for a balance in expression begins to show itself . . .

> Again the mild but incessant urge to check out the territory . . . you know the trees talk. They make a clicking chatter . . . I saw the tractor and turned right away for it! I had to touch it . . .

drawn by Arlen during her solo

"The tractor brought back a memory like a shot. I was within a couple of feet and I smelled it. Suddenly, I was back in my grandpa's shop playing for hours . . ."

During her exploration of the territory, Arlen becomes grounded in pleasant childhood memories. This gives her the courage to begin a personal assessment. "Guts are where it's all at. That's why my guts are nicely protected by a few layers of fat. I have to keep my guts

warm. . . . There are one or two things I'm unhappy about. Being chubby is the big one."

As the novelty of her new environment wears away, Arlen begins to look at the reality of being alone in this natural environment and to express some of the rainy day qualities.

> This wilderness has bugs. I just yelled as loud as possible--to relieve some frustration. These bugs don't stop and I'm beginning to feel neurotic . . . I'm starting to feel closed in upon . . . I'm bitten all over and I'm scratching. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe the forest doesn't want me here . . . I'm kinda scared. What do I do for three more days. This isn't the way I wanted to spend my time, scared and neurotic and worried whether a bug will land on me in the night.

She goes in and out of her restlessness and finds reprieve between the distractions of sleep and the peacefulness of her environment.

"The night air and light is very beautiful

The wilderness
Wilderness--wild
Wild and crazy--wild thing
I wiled away the hours

It's great. It makes me appreciate my hands and how expert they are at writing."

Arlen seems to be resigning herself to her current situation. As she admits her ambivalence towards the outdoors life she begins to explore how certain choices made in the past influence who and where she is today. A certain kind of distancing begins to occur whereby Arlen is able to confront her fears and simultaneously allow the elements of nature to become soothing. This facilitates a spontaneous inward journey.

> I lied Julie. I don't feel at home in the outdoors . . . the fears are city fears. Have I given up something to go to the city and be

> social and artistic? . . . I seem to be mouselike in a fearful sense. The wilderness simultaneously allows me to become vulnerable and absorbed . . . when I start it seems . . . a reflex action. I haven't calmed yet. No, I can't calm a reflex action but I can calm myself in my environment . . . One wildly exciting thing to watch in nature is everyone's defense. I'm interested in defense mechanisms. The spiders . . . play dead in one spot. One fleeting dream I recall . . . feeling so bad and stupid and inept. The wind here is so nice. So relaxing and steady. I love the wind. It seems to be able to blow the worries away. I was hardly frightened at all last night. I felt the wind was keeping me company. . . . I feel calmer today than yesterday.
>
> I imagine it's hard to give up patterns . . . victims of bourgeois. Forced to yield and to even worship values based on money/consumerism . . . Sometimes I wonder if being an actress and being socially normal can't happen. I've always wanted everything. Must I sacrifice then that for this lifestyle? . . . What is my natural bent? What is art? Why do we need it? Do I have an obligation as an artist (to society), as an individual? Am I a victim of my childhood conditioning? Am I being myself?
>
> . . . What happens when we look at a rose? Is spiritual knowledge activity? Listen to the essence of things. . . . A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

Having stayed with her restlessness and boredom, Arlen begins to observe her physical presence in relationship to her environment. As a balance to her inward exploration she discovers alternate forms of expression through her artwork.

> I don't particularly like the sound of my voice. The forest is loud enough . . . maybe I don't want to intrude . . . I have laughed only once out here . . . the laugh seemed foreign . . . one interesting thing that happens is that I start to be aware of my body and its uniqueness and also weaknesses and limitations. I walk with a heavy tread.
>
> I'm taking immense pleasure in my art. There is something so naturally peaceful in the colors here, once in a while I look at the pictures I've drawn. It's pleasant to look at them . .. it's a new feeling in a way. The creativity follows a different path. It's time consuming. That's what's so different. Most of my art takes a flash of time.

Through her artwork Arlen becomes calmed and more spontaneous in her actions. She notices her perspective of time gradually changing.

She eventually becomes bored with this form of expression however, and turns to her philosopher to delve deeper.

> I'm reflecting more and more as the hours pass by . . . time isn't much of a big deal out here .. . I eat and sleep and walk and clean and write and read and draw exactly when I want to.
>
> I'm no longer interested in art . . . I'm now entering a weird sort of waiting stage . . .
>
> I'm overall happy with my life . . . I know how to be happier. To learn more. To be able to articulate my values, my scattered principles. And that means to read more. And to talk more. And to value constantly, the little things . . . the sides of the mountain are of no less importance than the top. We should never give up our aim of reaching the top but should enjoy or at least perceive the journey.

As time wears on, Arlen is increasingly more content to explore her thoughts. She makes some realizations and resolves certain conflicts for herself.

> I should take care not to forget these moments of sitting and doing nothing. Even if only one moment at a time. That is progression as it was no moments at a time when I came.
>
> We need material goods for identity . . . I maintain we need some but not too many.
>
> Given the choice I prefer company . . . I need someone else to talk to. It's not enough to occupy my mind . . . There's little purpose out here. There's no reason to do anything . . . I'm bored with myself. There's too much to learn and see and try . . . believe me, the experience has sunk in. But I need someone else now.

Arlen continued to vacillate in and out of her calm states. By her last morning she created her own resolve by recognizing the control she has over her "vacillations."

> I have chosen to slow for a moment and enjoy my second cup of coffee . . . I knew the whole environment could get at me if I even began to think that way . . . every act of morning action made me feel calmer and calmer. I wasn't cold anymore . . . in order to naturally do unintimidated actions one has to be unintimidated . . . to overcome the intimidation one must first do it.

> The best thing out here alone is that you have no concept or worry about yourself in relation to other people . . . the worst possible thing to have happen out here would be boredom. Which did set in last night.

On Thursday evening when I came to meet Arlen, the fourth day of her solo, I walked into an empty meadow—greeting a soft "HELLO-O-O-O?" Seconds later she appeared on the path from the ridge where she had apparently been writing. She looked at me from a distance in silence. Smiling, she began to approach. She was weeping.

"I have not felt sadness here. I have not wanted to. The wells and pits of sadness are too vast to experience alone."

Attempting to track a hummingbird is certainly an impossible task. As the viewer we accept her appearance as a gift, and marvel at her unpredictable movements. One moment she is cruising the surface, flitting back and forth, and the next she is totally absorbed, delving deeper to obtain the rich nectar. She emerges with something different than she expected, yet equally as sweet.

When Arlen first arrived she revealed her personal agenda of wanting to explore certain vulnerabilities. She saw being able to do this by exposing her clown, or child, in an environment which she initially perceived as unassuming and accepting of her innocence. She began her journey with glimpses into unanswered questions and niggling fears. She wound her way deeper to explore personal questions relating

to the purpose of her life, and the significance of past decisions and experiences which influence her ability to change.

The wilderness provided Arlen with a playground of solitude in which to explore various modes of expression. This occurred as the novelty of being alone in the woods began to wear. Experiencing irritation, restlessness, and boredom, she chose to explore new paths. By focusing externally onto her surroundings, and through her artwork, she maintained the courage to continue her deep questioning. By developing her creative and innocent clown, the part of herself with whom she strongly identifies and most freely expresses, she simultaneously gains the strength to meet her contemplative philosopher. Through a series of wide pendulum swings, she winds deeper, eventually to attain a sense of her own limits and balance.

By reflecting on this process as a whole, and returning to individual movements within this process, certain themes emerge. The identification of these themes and the understanding of how they relate to the whole process, presents a glimmer of the essence of Arlen's solo as she experienced it then.

To recapitulate, the themes that emerged were:

a time to explore and balance a personal dichotomy through various forms of expression.

reassessment of personal values, clarification of future direction.

reaffirmation of her need for people and the need to balance this with times of aloneness (doing nothing).

a time to explore and express frustrations and negativities without external judgment.

a chance to confront and understand personal fears related to the outdoors.

a change in time perspective, a process of slowing down which triggers spontaneous movement.

expansion of creative expression through boredom.

attunement to body and to nature.

no need to compare herself with other people.

Arlen's Response to the Reconstruction of her Solo

I met with Arlen to discuss her impressions of my reflections on her solo. Following is a summary of these major points.

She responded to the theme: the solo provides a chance to confront and understand personal fears related to the outdoors. Arlen says that through her solo she began the process of understanding her fears, so that next time she would be able to continue where she left off. She would be able to observe herself and how she is controlled by her reflex actions. She sees the progression as becoming "calm through self-observation."

She reacted to the statement, expansion of creative expression through boredom. She described boredom as distasteful and vulgar, and preferred not to connect it with creative expression. She did not deny that there might be a connection, rather, she prefers the notion that creative expression emanates from inner artistic need.

She felt that the importance of humor was not adequately displayed in the reconstruction. We discussed this at great length and discovered the important role it plays in balancing her life. She describes her humor as the key to balancing the heaviness that develops out of deep exploration. "Meant for your enjoyment and my reality check. It makes a heavy statement less heavy." In the exploration of the dichotomy between her clown/child versus philosopher/adult, art/creativity versus sadness/intensity, Arlen views her humor as a way to express the ". . . not-in-good-taste" topics which are seen as unmannerly in our society. She sees her humor as a subtle gift which allows expression of her unassuming innocence . . . "in this wilderness you don't look over your shoulder or wash your hand apres bum wiping . . . in the wilderness you eat with your mouth open" . . . "I don't see any spiders for 2½ days and suddenly there's 14 of them in here. What? Did they just finish a spider assertiveness behavior course?"

As Arlen was sitting on the 'ridge,' shortly before my arrival, she wrote a story which seems to capture some of the vital elements of her experience (see Appendix).

The Solo Experience of Heather

Heather is a 29-year-old woman of average height and build, with short, curly, reddish-brown hair, freckles, and penetrating, dark brown eyes. She has a warm smile, a poised and friendly demeanor, and speaks with a soft British accent.

I met Heather through a friend when they came to visit me at my tipi. On first impression she appeared somewhat reserved but strong-willed. She was curious about my study and expressed a desire to do a solo herself. She lacked confidence in her outdoors skills and described herself as inept and lacking common sense. I was puzzled by this because I perceived her as being quite competent. The challenge of being alone in my tipi camp triggered a deep enthusiasm in her. She saw it as a time-out from her work as a counsellor, as well as an opportunity to expand her feelings of self-sufficiency.

As the time for her solo drew near Heather began to experience apprehension and self-doubt. Her trepidation she claimed, was sparked by her lack of confidence and fear of being alone. I met her at her apartment to deliver her journal and to see her off. Her apprehension

by this time seemed to be transforming into excitement. She declined my offer to escort her to the tipi, choosing instead to add the navigation to her challenge. As Heather was packing her bags she reminded me of a young girl on her first adventure away from home. She departed, beaming with pride and casual determination.

Heather's solo experience evolved as a meditative reflection on herself—her movements, her fears, her thoughts. She used her journal like a T.V. camera, gaining clarity and understanding by writing down observations of herself as she moved through her days. In a sense, her writing served as a meditative tool by which to ground herself in the present moment.

As I reflect on her journal I envision a meticulous swimmer searching for an ideal spot to dive into the river. She shivers as she tests the water with her toes, wondering what lurks below the surface. How strong is the current? Will it carry me away? Wavering back and forth she imagines the cold water against her skin. Finally, out of curiosity and sheer determination she takes the plunge. She is carried away; she flows with the stream. Her inquisitive nature lures her below the surface, her sense of survival guides her upward for air. As she reaches the opposite bank, she emerges . . . smiling.

Heather's sojourn begins in an almost business-like fashion. She articulates her personal agenda for her solo and organizes herself in order to fulfill these objectives.

> On the way out of Edmonton I was conscious of slowing down. I drove cautiously . . . found the tipi no problem, even made a couple of instinctive turns. Whoopee! . . . I felt more and more confidence.

> As I wrote that wasp attached itself to me . . . I'm not ready to stay with them yet . . . Modest objective for this weekend: learn to be more accepting of bugs?
>
> One of my agendas is to do exactly what I feel like in these three days. Slowly (meditatively) if possible . . . I want this journal to be neat--just noticed my irritation of running off the page. Is this silly stuff or part of how I need to pick flowers for the tipi . . . I feel this frustrated need for perfection before I can get into something totally.

Almost immediately, Heather becomes distracted by her fears. As she begins to write she observes her reactions to these fears. Through this process she gains distance from them.

> . . . The anticipatory fear is--somehow I'll be so out of touch/closed, that I'll be frantically 'there's a spider' . . . I don't even know why I'm scared or why he appears so grossly ugly to me . . . this is not going to be a cameo experience--you're still scared of spiders . . . just moved my shoes away from where I think the spider is sleeping . . . wish I could watch that spider's bum disappear out under the tent flap.
>
> I'm mad at the spider for interrupting my quiet space . . . I want to be able to drop these excuses . . . Sometimes, it's all I can do just to watch myself going into my trips and try not to get stuck in critical judgment.

Heather's self-observations, and subsequent coming to terms with her fears, allow her to focus on other aspects of her experience. As her preoccupation with the spiders lessens she enables herself to go inward, to observe herself at a deeper level.

> . . . spent some time watching what fear is like for me . . . panic, not being able to stay with fear . . . fear disconnects the parts of my body that I need to work together (to be calm/centered).
>
> My judgment of myself with regard to clumsiness, lack of coordination and stamina (and other camping essentials) seems to be based on comparisons/feeling left out and/or judged . . . losing my way.

Heather eventually encounters obstacles which create frustration for her. Without others to rely on and to compare herself, she begins

to develop a sense of pride in her accomplishments. Slowly, and with certainty, her personal agenda (objectives) begins to unfold.

> A combination of let's get on with the day; what a drag; and an underlying sense of excitement and growing energy and curiosity about what I'll feel like doing. And what will be presented to me.
>
> . . . Well, I'm starting to feel nervous and hostile already, 1) Couldn't get the lighter to work . . . 2) can't get the tape recorder to 'play' my meditation tape.
>
> Sure boiled water faster than I expected . . . My fire was made with rolled up scratch pad paper and twigs. No usee knifee. I note that I use sarcasm, cynicism and humor as an avoidance of taking my ineptitude seriously at times. I think it's better than taking it seriously . . . I did things less than expertly, but it feels okay and quite an accomplishment--all my own work.
>
> Lying in the sun. It felt great--hot, sweaty, and I was able to let the two or three wasps stick around my space, even spoke to a grasshopper for awhile."

Heather's connection to, and exploration of nature enable her to fulfill her slowing down objective. She develops confidence in her intuition and begins to explore some personal issues.

> I went to the river this morning . . . I sat on a rock. Watched the water for awhile. Masturbated. La di da . . . On my way back . . . there I was, in my underpants, semi-lost . . . I didn't laugh too much then. I stopped--got a feel for which direction to go in . . . and took off past the too unwilderness-looking tractor at a trot (breasts flapping in the wind). All paths lead to the same place I guess.
>
> I brought two things back from my walk to the river this morning. A small mauve flower and a piece of wood that 'caught my eye' around the time I was berating myself for walking too fast and being relatively unaware of my surroundings. Trust--Heather--and you'll see when the time is right.
>
> In the last month or so I've had a growing consciousness that my days of workaholism are almost over. It's feeling less comfortable to be so structured . . . more and more need to escape out of the head and into the quiet of the here-and-now. This wilderness experience is sure part of the journey for me.

As the novelty of her new environment begins to wear off, Heather experiences restlessness and boredom. "I feel a bit driven right now--maybe worried about what to do this coming evening . . . slept for a few hours. Woke up feeling awful."

She stays with her boredom and through the quiet of the evening examines the source of her dis-ease.

> Some fear at that periphery that I might lose control somehow . . . I judge that I am far too cautious--see 'symptoms of freakout' all too soon and get in the way of going through some stuff I need to explore more, or (devil's advocate) am I avoiding the abyss . . . Will I need to jump, shout, shake, and dance a couple of steps in front of lurking depression all my life?"

Heather's writing/reflections have a calming influence. Spontaneously, she seems to distance herself from previously distracting fears and begins to examine them at a deeper level.

> I feel more quiet and grounded . . . At times like these I feel the strength of the calm that may stay with me for longer than a few hours . . . is this really me sitting with the mozzies and other assorted bugs and not tightening up?

> I just remembered the dream . . . it feels scary and horrible . . . I was numbed by his violence . . . awoke to thunder, went out to close the rain (smoke) flaps. In the dark dark--aware that I wasn't without fear but that I was doing what I had to do without thinking despite the possible monsters in the bushes . . . it started to rain quite hard . . . lit a candle . . . then a sense of the dream (fear) and next the language for it returned, and I returned to the writing chair.

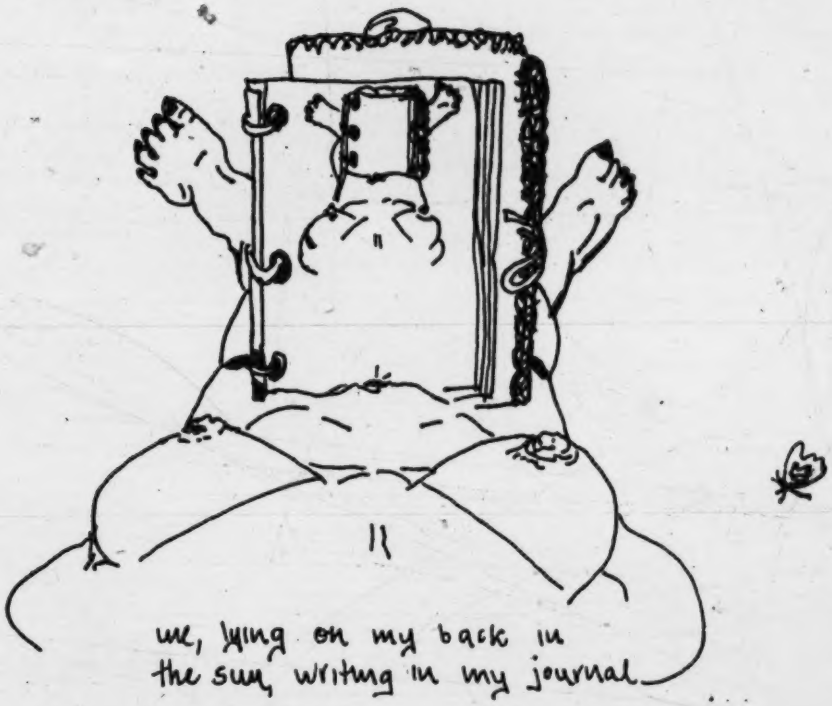
From this point on Heather lapses into an inward journey. Attaining a level of comfort and calmness within herself and her environment, she is able to drift in and out of philosophical ruminations.

> I'm moving with much less caution--was quite comfortable coaxing the fire this morning. The bugs upset me hardly at all . . . In that space between awake and asleep I dream . . . I was alone and would be going by myself . . . A woman's voice sings: 'The dragon doesn't live here anymore' and the next song is animal cries of such terrible longing and so beautiful and I cried. First time I've cried since I got here, although sometimes I feel the sadness coming up.

Heather continues to talk to herself through her writing. She explores personal issues relating to her sexuality, repressed childhood memories, relationships, and future potential. Her dreams become a rich source of illumination.

Through her process of personal exploration, Heather drifts from issue to issue. She examines her body image and the influence of this on her self-concept. Her experience takes on a rhythmic quality which reflects her growing comfort and slowed down pace.

> Today on my trip to the river I felt how differently my body is moving . . . It was great! I also found a song (melody, no words) coming out of my mouth so I sang most of the way there . . . I'm ok with my body out here--nothing sexually competitive can happen and I enjoy the sensation of sun and wind on my skin . . . no one to look at me here . . . no consideration of how I walk, my posture, pulling my stomach in etc. There's relaxation.



". . . this has to be the most sketching I've done since I was 12 years old . . . Once I knew how to do all these things freely."

As she recognizes her solo coming to an end, Heather prepares for closure. She reflects on her life at present and parallels this with her life in general. As she drifts she finds resolve.

> I sat up on the hill for quite a long time; listening, breathing and looking at the sun with eyes closed . . . feels good to have an accurate gut feeling about time.
>
> I want to leave as soon as Julie gets here--that's a pattern for me—blocked goodbyes. Frantic, driven needs to finish and leave . . . "Let's get it over with " I'm really mixed up about giving . . . To me, love is the wholehearted wanting to give . . . what to do but wait for it to happen. I can't calculate or plan generosity.
>
> The time is passing so fast. Three days have come and gone much more quickly than I would have thought. Nothing to do: Yes and

no. Nothing which had to be done. It sort of reminds me of how very dry skin absorbs moisturizing lotion--just sucks it in, gulps it in, absorbs it without visible trace. I know I need experiences of aloneness in the same way.

I always knew that my base fear was to be alone. I acknowledged it (sometimes) and continued like a busy little queen bee to build an empire around me which would prevent me from going through my aloneness. A secret that wasn't a secret. The secret I did hold was how and when I would be ready to drop the safety trappings.

As things come up for me I act sometimes well, sometimes badly, sometimes I stay and fight, sometimes I leave and then return to face them. Sometimes I accept and then forget for awhile. Sort of like my wilderness experience. The bottom line being that I open myself as much as I can to the opportunities presented to me.

I have this urge to pack up, be ready for when Julie comes. And I won't. I'm going slowly with awareness. . . . I just had this vision of myself dancing with some Africans . . . Maybe Kenya to start with. It'll be an adventure. One of those adventures/leaps into the unpredictable that I'll regret not making in my old age.

Heather and I sat up on the hill for an hour or so. It was a peaceful and warm summer's evening. The sun cast an orange light on the treetops as it made it's way slowly toward the horizon. We talked for awhile, and shared our food. Heather departed looking relaxed and content.

Heather fulfilled her personal objectives. Her initial resistance reflected her lack of self-confidence that was overcome by taking the plunge. It seems that Heather has a very high sensitivity to her fears; a sensitivity which can be immobilizing. She knew in her heart that she would benefit from a wilderness solo experience

but she needed the time, this period of anticipation/resistance, to muster the courage to ". . . leap into the unpredictable". She arrived with a personal agenda: to connect with her inner rhythms. A connection, an intimacy with herself, that allowed her inner wisdom to surface. A clarity of vision which gave her strength and confidence.

Heather's immediate obsession with her insect companions provided a distraction from exploring her deeper fears. A denial which is possible only as long as she kept busy. Heather's solo, a time-out from all the possibilities which exist in her hectic lifestyle, allowed her to confront some personal issues which had been lurking below the borders of her awareness. Her choice to spend three days alone in a new and unusual environment reflected her desire and readiness to delve deeper. Her introspection and resoluteness spawned a freedom of expression which allowed understanding. Through this understanding came acceptance.

Heather's solo experience was a small but significant step toward the acknowledgement of her inner strength. She is aware that her actions have a purpose, and that when this purpose is gone, her actions will change. Slowly but surely, the balance is achieved.

As I reflect on Heather's journal I become aware that several themes emerged. These are (not necessarily in order of frequency or importance because I'm not sure that this is an issue):

> a sense of pride--in her accomplishments, in terms of both being alone and in mastering (to her satisfaction) physical camping skills.

an attunement to and confidence in her natural body rhythms, relaxation, slowing down, changed perspective of body image.

a time-out from usual distractions which allowed her time for introspection.

the confrontation with and subsequent dissolution of, or at least coping with, niggling fears.

a change in time perspective. Time was not an issue for her as it is in town.

expanded creative expression, especially through sketching.

attunement to nature.

freedom from comparison.

Heather's Response to the Reconstruction of her Solo

Heather's first comment after reading these reflections/interpretations was "I didn't feel like I gained distance from my fear, it just changed." She claimed "The most real thing . . ." was leaving her fear of spiders but is unsure of what ". . . level it was connected." We talked about how it may have been a result of her freedom to express her fears, or how she put herself in the situation of having to use her own resources.

Our conversation led into a summary of what, in retrospect, Heather considers to be the most important aspects of her experience.

She claims that she is more comfortable spending time alone since her solo. Instead of being distressed by the prospect, she actually welcomes it. She views her apartment as a sanctuary and recognizes her tendency to create distractions.

She enjoyed not being able to compare herself with others. She looked at her need for perfection and the subsequent seriousness which results.

The solo provided her the opportunity to ". . . look at every moment." The simplicity and lowered stimulation allowed her to

gain ". . . more depth and grace" in her activities. She enjoyed being able to do things at her own pace and to ". . . get a sense of self without all the trimmings."

She cherished the time to explore childhood memories and to realize that "consequences are self-made."

She felt a freedom to express herself spontaneously and without encumbrances. She recognized her choice to be there and to take responsibility for the negativities which arose.

She described her experience as "The therapy was in the meditation . . . a time-out."

The Solo Experience of 'Doc'

Doc is a big man, 58 years old. An ex-farmer/rancher who carries himself as though he has walked many miles behind the horse and plow. Endowed with talents of both the hand and mind he gave up his farm-life to become a professor in Outdoor Recreation. He towers above most people and peering over his bi-focals, Doc is always ready for a chuckle. Looking dapper in either jeans or a suit he gives the impression of a man on his way to do a job. If you can coax him into sitting down for more than a half hour at a time Doc is an interesting and resourceful companion.

During my undergrad days in Recreation, Doc was instrumental in my developing an interest in psychology. His belief in the importance of group dynamics and communication added a special spice to our outdoor trips. He has a knack for 'stirring shit'. He is also very adept in a canoe, on skiis and on a horse.

I was delighted when Doc expressed an interest in doing a solo. Initially, I was surprised when he said he would be content doing a wilderness solo on the edge of town, at Whitemud Creek. He explained that as he has become older, he no longer requires the challenges he once did. Rather than hike into a remote wilderness setting he set his challenge as fasting for 4 days. He chose my tipi camp as a safe and comfortable environment in which to spend his time. When I escorted Doc to the camp, I sensed upon our arrival that he wanted to be left alone, ". . . to get on with it". I imagine him sighing a mixture of relief and panic at my departure.

As I read through Doc's journal I am reminded of the many moments I spent this summer gazing at the ants in the grass. They are fascinating to watch--always on the move and with so much energy. They appeared to be driven by some internal force as they tenaciously lifted and carried objects three times their size. I could never quite figure out where they were going with their treasures. Their direction seemed to be a secret.

Doc spent the first part of his solo getting organized and taking care of his physical needs. It was as if he had to burn off his restlessness before allowing the inner peacefulness to surface. He immediately began to build a direction finder which allowed him to keep track of time. This gismo made of sticks, representing his preoccupation with time, became a metaphor for his experience.

Chopped wood. Built a direction finder so I can judge time a

> little better. I don't feel hungry but feel at loose ends--wasting time. Looked at watch 6:45, listened to CBC for 2-3 mins. Sure feel like a cigarette. Feel alone and isolated . . . feeling tired, a little hungry. It's going to be a long 4 days. . . . I find it hard to get organized . . .

The challenge Doc set for himself was based on an intuitive sense, a knowledge deep within that he would benefit from this experience. At first he had a difficult time getting settled in. His familiarity with the outdoors setting however, helped to soothe his restlessness.

> No music, no food, no novels makes life a little boring . . . Really aware of the quiet and noise of the fire. Don't feel like talking. The rain stopped as a strong wind came up and blew the clouds away. You can hear the wind more than you can feel it . . . funny I don't miss having a beer etc.

Doc's organizational process involved the establishment of simple but apparently necessary rituals. These rituals became touchstones or reality checks around which he organized his days. These touchstones had a calming influence which allowed him to relax and go within.

> Went down to the van soon after getting up--it was 12:15 which surprised me, stayed and listened to CBC.

> Tidied up the tipi--a certain amount of tidiness seems important in how I feel about the place . . . then off to the van--check the time (10:14 mountain standard time and listen to Sunday AM for awhile . . . got organized so I can sit and write. . . . At times I feel very lonely and cut off from people/friends . . . spent some time writing to Jane about this experience, then started sharing thoughts about Jeff . . . It's not easy just being with myself (started to say oneself).

> . . . I finally got up about 9ish. Got organized, strolled down to the van. Listened to the news . . . spent awhile strolling along the river bank and sitting . . . Time seemed to move more slowly and that's ok.

> . . . Had a good wash including my undershirt. Chopped a pile of wood.

Through the order of his rituals came a sense of control and relaxation. Having created for himself a safe milieu in which to reflect on his experience, Doc began to explore inner thoughts and conflicts. These thoughts have a philosophical tone that guided him deeper, towards an assessment of his life in general.

> . . . Sometimes you get very confused with what you want to say . . . This wilderness experience . . . it's not that big a deal in some ways . . . The biggest aspect about this particular experience is the experience of the feeling of being alone . . . in a reasonably safe environment. And it's peaceful . . . free from any of the usual noises and sights . . . There's the absence of some of the normal conveniences such as automatic heating . . . easy accommodation in which to get up and walk around in and keep the place tidy.
>
> . . . The other big thing that's missing of course is people . . . I'm the type of person who relies a great deal on how I feel about myself and who I am in many ways from other people. So without people . . . Not an easy experience. I've had the most difficulty dealing with myself and I anticipated this . . . it's in many ways I didn't expect . . . feelings about myself like what have I accomplished at this point in my life-having felt that I've been a bit of a failure in my own terms. What can I do about that?
>
> I'm having to reassess my priorities . . . looking perhaps at a different lifestyle . . . those are the kinds of bummers . . . I feel I'm stuck with focussing on . . . without the presence of other stimuli. It's difficult for me to get involved with escaping by reading a good novel . . . or by getting into all kinds of work projects.
>
> The other aspect of this experience . . . is the feeling of not being involved or of doing something that is useful . . . There seems to be part of me that says I need to be doing something useful in order to be worthwhile. I guess that's the same concept that frightens me about retiring.

By this time Doc is organized, comfortable, and enjoying his own company. As he continues to talk to himself he spontaneously

takes risks which he might not otherwise have done in the presence of others.

> In some ways I'm in a stage of change again . . . To look at changing how one is, how one behaves is the risky one . . . I have this fear that I won't be able to do it in an acceptable way or appear silly or funny . . . I guess that's always been a hangup of mine . . . So, I feel a little more relaxed having said that.

Having reached this point of self-honesty, and no longer prodded by his restlessness, Doc begins to experience a shift in his time perspective. No longer caught up in his need to organize he is able to stand back and see how his preoccupation with time restricts rather than guides him.

> This seems to be a perpetual state of mine--always behind . . .
>
> I need to reassess my priorities or . . . how I estimate time re, time it takes to do certain things and how I keep ending up getting really strung out--some of my own doing, which really brings me to focus on making a decision related to being present enough from all the dense association.

Although he never really loses track of time, Doc begins to more spontaneously incorporate time into his moment to moment actions. With one finger on the clock he is able to close his eyes and ruminate in almost total relaxation. In this state he is able to observe himself from a distance and in a sense, to befriend himself. Spontaneously, he becomes more attuned to his body and aware of his physical limits.

> It's almost dark so it must be 10:30 or so. Really very cosy and warm, however, frequently this afternoon . . . I was becoming quite anxious about . . . having too many things to do . . . this isn't unusual for me to get more things on my platter than I can handle.
>
> . . . be it wilderness or any other setting in which I find myself alone I've come face to face with myself and the way I've led my life . . .

> . . . last night in my dream . . . I did cry. It was interesting. I think if I didn't have the wherewithall to build a fire I would go a little batty. I find my fire not only warm but friendly and I really enjoy to watch flickers and changes in many different ways.
>
> I just came back from a hike down to the river . . . I was surprised to notice sweating and breathing at a reasonable rate. I still wasn't tired and I still had energy, so when I got back I decided to wash up.

As Doc's solo wears on, his pace becomes noticeably slower. His ruminations guide him towards resolve.

> . . . for me the wilderness is being alone and separate from so-called civilization, and there are degrees of that separateness . . . having the time to think and reflect on wherever my feelings and thoughts may go. And for me that is the . . . discomfort of being alone and why I characteristically in my everyday life avoid being alone for most of the time . . . with very few distractions.
>
> It's really been very peaceful. Of the 4 days, certainly this has been the most peaceful for me in terms of environment, also in terms of myself. I think it has something to do with winding down and taking some time, things I don't usually do . . . . I've resolved a few things for myself in terms of some decisions and some approaches and attitudes. And in some ways I've become more comfortable with myself and that's pretty new for me.
>
> It's important to take time and be by oneself without having distractions, or people, radios, all kinds of things to do . . . As long as you can have that time . . . do nothing, just feel and react and be part of whatever environment that you have within the city.

By the end of his solo, Doc felt ready to merge his re-found peace into his everyday world. When I came to meet Doc on the evening of his fourth day I was greeted by a smile full of pride, clear eyes, a relaxed-looking face, and a chuckle. As he was eating his break-fast of salad we talked about his experience. Gradually, he became mesmerized by the fire and began to nod off. Setting his alarm for 5:30 am he crawled into his bed mumbling a contented good-night.

> The farther you are away from civilization the less temptation you have to make contact . . . One has to look at one's temptations.
>
> I still have a lot left to do but I do have direction. It feels good to sit up here on the ridge and just take the whole country in . . . I think I'm going to join a bird club--or put my record of birdsongs on tape so I can take it with me to the wilderness.

I sat and reflected on Doc's journal and tape for a long time trying to imagine what his four days were really like for him. As I drifted in my muses an image of the ants came to mind. His getting organized phase reminded me of the ants exploring an area, apparently looking for food to take back to their nest. I watched an ant for 15 minutes so purposefully go in circles.

Doc's direction-finder provided an apt metaphor for his experience. Initially pre-occupied with time, and direction-less, he eventually wound down to a state of clarity and peacefulness. It appears that this quest for direction and clarity may have been a hidden agenda apart from his goal to fast for the four days. By establishing certain rituals he became organized and comfortable within his environment. Gaining a sense of control and settled-in-ness he went within to explore personal issues. Since there were no people to distract or to bounce ideas off, Doc stayed with his issues, carried them deeper, and eventually found resolve on his own.

When I met Doc on his final evening I was impressed by his overall light and carefree manner. His air of dogged purposefulness and seriousness had diminished. He seemed more content

to float from moment to moment, claiming he had ". . . nothing else to do". He had a perpetual smile and radiated inner contentment. From Doc's experience I derived the following themes that seem to, at least partially, capture/summarize what happened for him over his four-day solo:

> he had a sense of pride in being able to successfully complete his fast. The fasting cleansed his body as well as creating a sense of fine-tuning, increased physical sensitivity.
>
> he developed an attunement to his senses, especially hearing.
>
> due to the lack of schedules and distractions he was free to explore thoughts and feelings as they arose. He was able to develop certain philosophies regarding his relationship to the wilderness and to the city. He explored personal values, assessed priorities and made plans for future change.
>
> there existed a preoccupation with time, which receded as his solo progressed.
>
> he created certain rituals which acted as organizational touchstones or reality checks.
>
> by staying with his boredom and restlessness he eventually utilized his time in personally creative ways, through exercise, exploring deep thoughts and taking personal risks. He recognized his appreciation for and dependency on people in order to explore certain issues.

Doc's Response to the Reconstruction of his Solo

When Doc read my reconstruction of his solo experience he got a chuckle out of some of my descriptions of him. We talked for quite a while about his need to organize his environment in order to create a satisfactory level of comfort and contentment. He says that he enjoys creating his own space, ". . . being organized allows me to move more freely." The higher his level of comfort, the lower is his anxiety.

Doc said that I missed the essence of his last day. As compared to his first three days, he said that on his fourth day he had a much higher energy level and ". . . flow around not being concerned with time." He felt more in syntony during his last day, ". . . able to do everything I wanted to do without pressure."

Doc described his process as creating a base by ". . . having my own little world", exploring his surrounding environment and eventually getting over being frustrated being with himself. He began ". . . relaxing and letting things happen." We talked about how going inward (through his letter to Jane) reduced his anxiety and subsequently allowed his level of comfort with himself to increase. Doc felt that merely ". . . having the time" helped to create feelings of accomplishment. He described himself as ". . . busy-oriented" and that ". . . taking time is a different from normal experience." He felt good not feeling rushed, he felt free to do things that felt good in the moment, for example, snoozing and strolling to the river. It seems that being alone allowed him to establish his own natural cycles and eventually, to deal with time in a whole new way.

The Solo Experience of Joe

Joe is a 29 year old, dark-haired, bearded man with a tall and slender build. He is a person of few words whose responses reflect careful listening and deep thought. He generally greets people with a nod and a handshake, and on first impression, appears quite

serious. I met Joe 10 years ago during an outdoor recreation class at University. Throughout the classes he watched with the eye of a hawk and contributed by asking questions, food for thought which he had obviously pondered. A deep and lasting connection was triggered between us during a four-day winter campout. While we were cutting willows for a sweat-lodge he asked me if I ever thought trees could feel. I was taken aback by this question because it was precisely what I had been thinking at that moment. From then on I knew that we shared a deep and similar appreciation for nature.

As our friendship grew we spent many hours philosophizing about the use of the wilderness in working with troubled youth. Eventually working together, our understanding of each other grew and our bond of friendship deepened. During this time Joe was doing some intense personal searching. Decisions made at that time influenced to a large degree his current occupation and lifestyle. He is the director of an organization which bases its philosophy on combining Christianity with nature. Participants are provided the opportunity to explore spiritual dimensions while developing their outdoor leadership skills. They believe that this combination provides the basis for long-lasting change in young people.

Through our discussions Joe has been quite instrumental in developing the topic of this study; because of this, his participation seems both natural and necessary. When I first presented to Joe the idea of doing a solo he was delighted because he had not done one in three years. He described it as an inspiration time,

a chance to focus and to make decisions without outside input and distraction.

Initially Joe wanted to do his solo on top of a trickling waterfall overlooking Kootenay Plains. This particular area is set aside by the Natives as part of the sacred ceremonial grounds--for vision quests. Young people are situated at various campsites and are left without food for three to four days. Any dreams or visions they have during this time are interpreted according to Native spiritualism. Since the Natives were using the area at this time for their Sundance Celebration, Joe chose to hike up an isolated stream further down the valley. His camp consisted of an orange tarp strung between the trees. He neither ate food nor built any fires during the four days. It snowed and/or rained almost the whole time.

Given these conditions I suspect that Joe basically hibernated for four days. His extensive experience and prolonged exposure to the outdoors allowed him to not be preoccupied with basic comfort needs. He saw this as a chance to return to simplicity. When I left him at his prospective campsite at the beginning of his first day, I imagine Joe sitting down by the stream and becoming slowly mesmerized by the sound and movement of the water.

> Having sat here for hours, feeling nothing but quiet--listening to the brook--enjoying the sun. What an incredible difference in speed. Being amongst the trees has always given me the feeling of quiet, peace,serene. . . . One of the best things of being alone for me becomes the rest. No expectations, no demands, nothing special to do. . . . the epitomy of laziness. . . . wandering around the hills with no destination, desire, destiny at the moment.

As Joe sits and reflects he begins to hone in on his own specific process, using his relationship to the mountains as a metaphor for how he lives his life. As he examines his process he begins to delineate personal patterns and values.

> As soon as I get higher up I start to think of beauty and of time. A terrible desire to climb all the heights around me--leave the mountains pretty futuristic--always wanting to do that climb or this--no matter how good today's view is. I've often found that my solos became solo trips i.e. going from A to B with a definite purpose in mind--as well as being alone. A definite work ethic I inherited--having to accomplish things in a given period of time--easy to become like the capitalists. . . . Although, without a dozen definite short and long term goals I would be pretty lost and frustrated.

Slowly, Joe begins to create his own vision quest. A vision quest in the sense that he begins to assess his options for the future and to clarify for himself that his current direction is the right one. He questions his own values against those of society and in so doing justifies his lifestyle. His solo becomes a time for assessing personal change.

> There always seems to be a great deal of futuristic thought for me. Even though I'm even now making my past dreams come true. I do lead the lifestyle and have the priorities I want now--although even with that there are always future things and goals for me. . . . Probably what makes humans the eternal optimists they are. Body and mind need new stimuli. Maybe that's why I look for new goals, plans, before the old ones run out. . . . How come when people get comfortable are they willing to vegetate! Don't rock the boat--no risk, no changes, no new things: what makes the desires change?
>
> Sitting here by the creek watching the water flow. . . Clearwater. I enjoy that town. . . . I moved there to get out of the Albertan race. . . . it will be interesting to see how our lifestyle changes once we get into our own house. . . . Going to enjoy having a place to go back to after journeys and do with it as I want.

Joe purposely excluded food preparation and fire building from his solo because he considered them to be distractions. It would appear that he wanted to attend to his thoughts as they arose and to stay with them, allowing them to take him deeper within himself. His only diversions from boredom become an occasional hike up the hillside and the meandering expression of inner thoughts and fantasies. Through his wanderings he re-confirms his spiritual beliefs.

> Kind of a dreary day. Sitting here wondering what to do. . . Always wished I could draw. Just for times like this. Just to be able to capture stuff like this. . . . I sat here for a couple of hours just looking around at the panoramas and vistas. It's always amazed me how anybody who spent time in the mountains and in nature could look at this and look at the systems and all the interactions and say there wasn't a God involved in the process, just by Chance or a Big Bang. . . . I do believe there is a God and that he's had a hand in all this.

With no camp activities to distract him, and confined to his sleeping bag under the tarp, Joe lapses into a peaceful state of resignation. The constant pitter-patter of rain and snow had a somewhat mesmerizing effect on his thoughts. Joe's solo became a journey through time with his fantasy as his guide; he is entertained by his spirit of pioneer adventure.

> Thinking how much I enjoy sitting under plastic, listening to the rain. Often wished I were born to be 20 years old in the late 1800s. To be able to explore this area of Canada and know you were the first person into a set place must have been something. . . I think that is what drives folks to first ascent climbs. Not necessarily for their hardness--but because you know for certain no one else has ever touched this spot. . . . I often look at the old timers and wonder what they think of changing things today. . . . I always wanted to meet Lou Peskett. Basically he was possessed by the idea and did everything himself. . . .
>
> . . . I have always wondered what I would be doing at 40 or 50.

Joe's solo takes on a vacillating quality. As he drifts lightly among his fantasies triggered by the environment, he takes periodic plunges into the world of reality. Possessed by the idea of utilizing the wilderness as a medium for work and for spiritualism, he examines the role of the solo within this medium. His thoughts have a certain philosophical quality which provide him a sense of purpose and focus during his journey.

> It is very easy over the years to start within the wilderness environment and enjoy it initially because of its solitude, the enjoyment of the natural environment itself, and as time goes by to get involved more and more with challenging activities. I think it is a shame for folks to get involved in the challenging wilderness activities without gaining a respect for the environment.
>
> Any society that can make soaps' the best seller on TV and in books has got big problems--Hard to believe that I'm watching hundreds of gallons of water go by.
>
> When I look back at what the last 10 years has done to attitudes to the wilderness . . . I wonder what the next 10 years will bring . . . The wilderness environment has given me a way to express myself--my desires, ambitions, dreams.
>
> What about the folks who are confused, uncertain, don't care . . . My basic premise though, is that they do care. No one wants to act confused and uncertain. Talk to me about young people today. Definitely confused . . . As soon as you question your personal beliefs life gets confusing. Directions become muddled from too many options.
>
> I have always used times alone for dreams and planning futures . . . Wondering how long a good solo should be . . . Have we put enough thought into who should be put on solos? The solo: A separate entity?, . . . or is it best used within a continuum of an educational/therapeutic process? . . . it depends on where the individual is coming from. . . . intention of using them as a reflective tool that says, what will I accomplish from here.
>
> . . . Over history the natives started solos . . . they use them for spiritual significance and vision and communication and time by themselves. To a certain extent I think that's why we still use them . . . whether it's with a god or not there's a certain

> spiritual sense for us . . . it's from the inner resources, from the reflection--actual time to sit and look on an individual's life and whether its been worth it to date--whether there's changes to be made and where you go from here . . . I think solos just by their very nature say there are things that should be considered . . . throw out the garbage and keep the good things.

Using his environment as a touchstone/distraction, Joe continues to brainstorm the uses for the solo (e.g. family therapy situations, urban solos, individual solos on a regular basis to combat stress). He ponders in detail the philosophy surrounding each idea in such a way that his solo becomes his own project of study. As he distances himself from his experience he becomes his own researcher.

> I think a solo experience can be just a separation of an individual from their normal lifestyle . . . I think in many respects it's that new environment to people that causes some reflection . . . just 'cause it is new and they do start looking around and wondering . . . I think for somebody that enjoyed drawing . . . a solo could be really creative."

Throughout his four days alone, Joe thinks about significant relationships, past and present, and the value of his life experiences to date. He ponders his future dreams and ambitions. As his solo draws to an end he summarizes his experience and prepares to reenter his normal lifestyle.

> Seems like a lot of friendships begin and end over timing and convenience . . . memories; how much we go through and the time we spend making them. Humans seem to be afraid of getting old without them.

> Amongst my list of goals is to see all the different wilderness areas and to experience them . . . the house building is a dream, almost complete . . . someplace to run and hide.

> It has been an excellent break here--no intrusions, forgotten problems to deal with . . . No huge startling discoveries, although definitely a renewing of the desires to get away from the masses of folks making demands and expecting from me. This is what life is all about. The ability to have time to myself.

I wandered around Kootenay Plains on the last day of Joe's solo. The snow was falling and although the area had been vacated, I could feel the aliveness in the air from the native's summer solstice celebration. I gazed up at the waterfall overlooking the Plains. The beat of drums resonated.

Tramping through the bushes along the winding creek I arrived soaking wet at Joe's campsite. The site of his orange tarp was a welcome reprieve. Bundled in his sleeping bag, his eyes lit up when he saw me.

> One thing I find without a second person to talk to . . . my verbalizing is not as creative or as original as what it is when I have somebody to bounce it off--'cause they ask questions and they say things that create thought . . . I sit here and think one stream of thoughts.

During his time alone, Joe discovered the importance of himself-in-relationship. Alone, he was able to nourish original thought. By the end of his solo, he recognized his need for other people to enhance the expression and growth of this original thought.

As I project back to the weekend of Joe's solo I am struck by the number of contrasts that seemed to have occurred. Initially, Joe was fired up about spending his four days atop a waterfall overlooking some very spectacular scenery. He imagined himself basking in the sun on the first day of summer and lolling about above tree-line. Instead, he found himself tucked into an isolated canyon surrounded by trees and confined by snow and rain.

He seemed to take it all in stride. The stream flowing by his tarp became his best friend, along with his active guides, the dreamer and the philosopher. With no man-made distractions to tease him out of himself, Joe had no other choice but to follow the blend of his inner thoughts as they arose. The thoughts vacillated and spiralled towards a deeper understanding of himself, his fantasies, personal/societal issues, spiritualism, relationships.

Joe's solo evolved as a time for personal assessment. In some ways he was embedded in his own thoughts, and in others, quite objective. One moment his dreamer would be fantasizing about life on the Plains in the 1800's and in another, his philosopher would be steeped in resolving the problems of young people. The wilderness environment provided him the means by which to strike a balance between the two.

Joe's love for the wilderness and his resilience shone through. His solo was a re-treat in the true sense of the word.

As I reflected on Joe's recordings, and attempted to gain a sense for the essence of his experience, a number of themes seemed to surface. Viewed cumulatively, these themes are meant to summarize for the reader what was happening for Joe, inside, as he sat alone for four days. To recapitulate, these themes are:

> feeling free from expectations and demands, both from himself and from others, he was able to relax and rest. Time was not an issue. Unconcerned with time he subsequently slowed down his pace.
>
> having no food or fires was a personal challenge which eliminated distractions and fostered a sense of personal pride. The lack of distraction allowed him to stay with his inner thoughts, to delve into them more deeply, as he wanted to do.

he examined his own process, a self-evaluation of his futuristic tendencies. He delineated personal values and set personal goals.

he thought about significant relationships. He recognized his need for stimulation through other people.

his time became a meditation. He sat for hours, watching his thoughts drift by. It was a time for fantasy and creative thought. A type of distancing occurred whereby he became his own researcher. He philosophized about the solo while he experienced it. He came to value the solo as a time-out from his usual lifestyle.

he experienced spiritual re-confirmation.

the wilderness environment provided a reality check or balance between the lightness of fantasy and heaviness of philosophy.

Joe's Response to the Reconstruction of his Solo

Overall, Joe felt that my reconstruction of his solo experience was quite accurate. We discussed each section in detail and periodically drifted into philosophical tangents. He found it interesting to see some of his own material reflected back to him through the eyes of another person. He enjoyed receiving another perspective, especially one that might help him to more clearly see his own process of the dreamer/philosopher. My words for his experience which he claims is ". . . true--never thought of it that way".

Joe had difficulty however, with my comments relating to the personal challenge in not having food or fires. He claims that he had a sense of pride in going without food but felt that ". . . fires were a hassle." He discussed the absence/presence of food and fires in context of their use within programs. Through his experience we concluded that the absence of food may in fact be a distractor from contemplative thought because of the pre-occupation with hunger pangs. In terms of

incorporating the solo into a program, Joe thinks that food which requires minimal preparation is a good idea. Depending on the person and the weather, the presence of fires may or may not foster introspection. The length of the solo and the time spent gathering wood might detract from contemplation.

Joe was interested in my comment about him becoming his own researcher. He says that given a different structure, going out on his own apart from my study, he probably would not have analyzed the solo in the way he did.

REVIEW AND OVERVIEW OF THE FIVE SOLO EXPERIENCES

As I review my reflections/reconstructions of the co-researchers' descriptions it becomes apparent that certain themes existed for everyone. There were variations within these themes, according to the individual and unique experiences but, in essence, they all shared some common threads. I will summarize these common threads in an attempt to provide the reader with a flavor of each person's solo experience as it was presented to me.

Change in Time Perspective

The first of these relates to the element of time and how one perceives time in relation to his/her experience. For instance, if you were to place perspective of time on a continuum, Doc and Heather would probably be at opposite ends. Throughout his solo, Doc made constant reference to the time, whereas Heather rarely mentioned it. Doc and

Heather entered their solos as different people with different sets of expectations, subsequently, their experiences differed.

It is interesting to note however, that throughout the solos, everyone experienced a change in their usual perspective of time. There was a general slowing down in pace and a development of an intuitive sense for time as opposed to a clock sense. This is not to say that time was necessarily any less important. It was gauged according to sleeping and eating patterns and the location of the sun in the sky. Time became a reference point for the present instead of a ruling force for the future.

Freedom from Routine and Distractions: Simplicity

This change in time perspective is inevitable considering the changes in the soloists' physical environment. They virtually transplanted themselves into an environment which was unusual and lacking in common amenities. Freed from the usual distractions and routines of everyday life life there was a rippling effect on their experience. The change in time perspective is one aspect, the return to simplicity, another. With no phones to answer, places to go and business to attend, the solo sites necessitated only the basics for survival.

One only has to think how different life would be if the primary concern was to gather food each day. As the basics of food and/or warmth were attended to and no other distractions provided, the solo became a rather basic existence. With less stimulation the role and

meaning of time gained significance in one sense, and lost significance in another.

Spontaneity

Attunement to natural rhythms. Given the lack of usual distractions and diminished preoccupation with clock time, the soloist is freed to wander through his/her days without any of the usual and necessary intentions. Gradually, each soloist developed routines (or rituals) that evolved out of present desire and/or need. I imagine Darren waking up on his first morning ravenous from his fitfull night, devouring his breakfast. As he proceeded through his days his actions reflected his current state of mind, body, emotion and spirit. This was the case for everyone. Both Arlen and Heather were amazed at how right in the middle of a drawing, they would each get up and find themselves doing something totally different.

Without the pressure of having to stick with the particular activity, the soloist is free to develop his/her own rhythm or flow. The significance of this becomes clear when considering the difference between living alone and with other people. Without other people to influence us or around whom to adapt ourselves, we naturally establish our own cycles.

Freedom of expression. It is much easier and more acceptable to express the full realm of our emotions when we do not feel judged. Whether it be flatulating, burping or screaming, these are all forms of expression which we normally (perhaps mostly from good manners) keep to

ourselves. For each of the co-researchers, the solo evolved as a time to break away from, or at least examine, the normal cultural/personal expectations and limitations. This process, of course, will vary for each person. For instance Heather felt free to shout, cry, laugh or dance on impulse. She mentioned how lovely it would be if she could do this in the city. Arlen on the other hand, felt muted in her verbal expression yet freely expressed herself on paper. This greater freedom of expression is a result of both being alone and having the time to explore emotions.

Creative expression. Each of the co-researchers developed different than normal forms of expression that might be considered creative. Arlen, Darren, Heather, and Joe each drew or painted pictures that they felt captured in a new way, the essence of their experience in that moment. Artistic expression which veers away from standard forms of linguistic expression is beautiful and yet often difficult to perceive with the same intensity and meaning that is intended by the artist. I have included in the body of the text and in the Appendix, some of these expressions which the reader is invited to interpret for him/herself. Perhaps as a result of being alone and having time on their hands, the soloists were enticed to explore other modes of expression that would reveal in an alternate but no less meaningful way, the essence of their experience in that moment. Doc, instead of drawing, utilized the tape recorder to capture his thoughts. This mode, which initially felt foreign to him, gradually became an item of convenience which allowed him greater spontaneity and depth in his

expression. It is interesting to note that each soloist at one point or another, felt restricted in his/her verbal expression. This reveals the paradox of language, its usefulness for communication with others and its restrictiveness for expression of self.

Attunement to Senses and Nature

What a nice feeling it is to lie in bed in the morning and know that there is nothing that must be done. Such a pleasant gift to be awakened by birds, the sound of running water, sunshine streaming in through the tent, or the smell of morning mist. When we do not have to scurry about with daily preparations or become distracted by conversation, we eventually begin to notice our immediate environment.

Returning to the peacefulness and freshness of nature has a subtle and profound effect on our senses. The irony however, is that we often do not notice the constant overload on our senses until we are removed from the busy environment. With no distractions and plenty of time to do nothing the environment becomes a source of entertainment.

For each of the soloists, nature provided a kind of touchstone or reality check, a natural means of balancing inward journeys. For example, a walk to the river or a hike up the hillside often followed periods of intense personal searching. Focusing on nature provided a pleasant distraction from boredom. Sitting by the stream and staring into the water, exploring paths, or standing on the hillside feeling, smelling and listening to the wind became pleasant pastimes. And to balance the pleasant there was the unpleasant. Bugs and poor weather, integral parts of nature, kept the soloists alert and humble.

Sense of Pride

Each co-researcher was given the choice of location and circumstances for his/her solo. It is interesting to note that everyone was personally challenged in some way. For Doc and Joe, fasting for four days was a significant challenge. For Arlen, Darren and Heather, each of whom had limited outdoor experience, the factor of being alone in the outdoors was challenge enough. Each participant had his/her own set of expectations and entered the solo with varying degrees of excitement and/or trepidation. Everyone, by the end, beamed with pride and a new kind of excitement.

Appreciation of Relationships

In one way or another, everyone expressed their need for and appreciation of people. The solo provided a time-out, a retreat, a removal of the physical self from significant relationships. In a sense, a distancing occurred whereby the individual was forced to evaluate his/her role with respect to other people. One paradox of being human is that we often do not appreciate what we have until it is gone. Time alone in the outdoors creates a swing in the pendulum of relationships. It creates the opportunity for a new or broadened perspective. The degree of this appreciation is related to such things as the length of time alone and the individual needs of each person at that particular point in time. For instance, Joe and Heather enjoyed the absence of people yet anticipated renewing their quality

relationships on their arrival home. Doc, Darren, and Arlen made clear statements during their solos about their starvation for contact.

The other side of this 'coin,' is the freedom that comes from not having anyone with whom to compare and consult. This freedom invites original thought and a re-acquaintance with one's inner being. It is a time to identify, re-connect and challenge one's personal resources without external input. In a relationship it is two people responding to individual calls, a separation and a coming together. Like changing seasons, it is dormancy of winter.

> But the dormancy is only external. What happens to the things of the earth in winter, when time seems frozen, when nothing seems to be growing? . . . While the earth sleeps at the surface, she is sending her deepest energy into all of her children. During their period of rest she is preparing them for the period of rapid growth to follow (Sun Bear and Wabun, 1980:134).

Fortunately, winter does not last forever. Winter without spring is like night without day, is like being alone without someone to share.

I am reminded of the saying "no man is an island unto himself." As living, sentient beings we cannot exist without others in whom to confide, to interact, to give, to receive, to share. It is through our interactions with others, our being-in-the-world, that we learn of our unique and true natures. Contemplation without participation leads to mind-boggling stagnation. Participation (in the world) without reflection dissipates inner wisdom, the knowing of our true selves.

This knowledge of self can never be complete because we are always changing in response to our environment. This responding to change necessitates a certain flexibility characteristic of the healthy individual or society.

As humans with rational minds we are endowed and burdoned with the knowledge of our bodies as both subject and object. The knowledge of one enhances the knowledge of the other when there exists the willingness and capability to both absorb and rebound. The healthy, growing individual maintains a balance that fosters creative change. The change is re-creative when one is able to incorporate elements of the environment, such as interactions with other persons into the unique characteristics of the self, and to give it back, project it back into the environment. The movement within this cycle promotes continuous change. When this cycle is interrupted, or arrested, as in the case of imbalanced contemplation or participation, the movement (change) may be retarded or diverted. The essence, self, remains the same, but the knowledge of self may never totally emerge.

Consider for instance, the metaphor of a burning ember. The essence of heat or fire remains the same, regardless of its form. It may vary in intensity or source (one log or twenty) yet its heat can still be recognized. The burning ember, through combustion, consumes in order to radiate. As long as there is fire or heat, there exists this interchange.

Paralleling the self to this ember, the addition of fuel resembles our interaction with our environment. Just as the ember cannot burn forever on its own, neither can the self survive alone (solo). And yet, without this ember existing in the first place, there can be no combustion. It is through the union of selves that souls become ignited--united.

When we share ourselves with others we both absorb and radiate.

It is a delicate balance, this going within . . . in order to go without

to accept that our relations with others,

our being-in-the-world

provides the illumination, the mirror, the cues

for further action,

for (intentional) change.

As the dormancy of winter emerges into spring, so must the solo self emerge into the world. The cycle goes on.

Humor

The final theme relates to the role of humor. I am especially grateful to my co-researchers for bringing this to my attention, for in my resoluteness, the significance of this theme eluded my grasp. This inadvertently, is a valuable lesson for me as a re-searcher. Even though the descriptions had me in stitches I failed to see the relevance in a broader context.

How does one describe the gentle-ness, subtlety, and magic of humor? It has the power to transform reality into the absurd. Or is it the absurd into reality? Is it a distraction, a reality check, does it have a purpose? How do you define its existence? Is it one of those things that could be considered the spice of life?

It creates happiness, it shifts focus.

In retrospect, the prevalence of humor throughout the descriptions becomes very obvious. Darren play-acting into the tape-recorder, Arlen and Heather throwing in out of nowhere their comical pictures and dry comments, Doc strolling to the van every hour to check the time and catch the news, and Joe giving a play-by-play commentary of the rain beating on his roof ". . . the sounds of silence."

> Much of the secret of life consists in knowing how to laugh, and also how to breathe (Watts, 1972:7).

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

I chuckle to myself as I look back on my original idea for this study. It began as an intense desire to be true to myself, to explore a topic that was close to my heart and to include people as co-researchers who shared a similar affinity for my topic.

The topic began as the wilderness . . . what does it mean to other people? Do others experience nature in the same way as I? What is it that lures me, and others, to the wilds?

This topic of the wilderness blended well with my growing interest in existential/phenomenological research. And somewhere, I can't remember when, it evolved into being alone in the wilderness. The beauty of science is that it provides an excuse to study, to re-search something of personal interest. The beauty of school is that it presents topics which one normally would never hear about in the workaday world.

When I explain my thesis topic to my workmates and friends, I inevitably describe it as ". . . my chance to do what I want . . . it's my own creation." In the words of Alan Watts, it presents my ". . . search for something more simple and direct that would convey the spirit and style in which I have tried to live . . . Something which

> comes naturally to me, that is honest, sincere, genuine, and unforced; but also perverse, although you must remember that this word means per (through) verse (poetry).

> . . . to follow your own weird . . . is perfect freedom; . . . the task and delight of poetry is to say what cannot be said, to eff the ineffable, and to unscrew the unscrutible (1972:ix-x).

To develop an art one must learn the necessary skills. This requires a certain amount of discipline. I admit that my study has not been totally unforced, however it has taught me more about the fine line between force and effort.

I am reminded of earlier quotations in which phenomenological research necessitates a keen and personal interest by the researcher in her study. I have interpreted this to mean that my research, because of personal involvement and reflection, will inevitably reflect my own process. I did not realize the impact of this at the beginning, as I do now. By asking six people to be my co-researchers (I did not include my sixth co-researcher's account since she became inaccessible after her solo) I discovered a realm of learning which would combine both art and science. Science in the sense that I tried to maintain a certain rigor and professionalism within my methodology, art in the sense that I was able to maintain my personal integrity, to not sell my soul in the name of objectivity and to lose sight of my quest for understanding in the desire for generalization.

I am delighted by the significant themes which emerged. The study helped me indeed to go beyond my original preconceptions and biases. Not only did I increase the breadth of my knowledge regarding the wilderness solo, especially the importance of humor, I also was able to explore each of the phenomena in greater depth.

The review and overview of the five solo experiences highlights the major themes which surfaced as I reflected on each person's solo experience. I described these themes as common threads which existed despite variation, for everyone. I deliberately left out certain phenomena because they do not seem to fit in this section. I feel more comfortable placing these phenomena into a category I call Process. I am choosing to deal with them separately because I see them providing vital links to something greater, something deeper.

The word Process has many connotations depending on its context. I view Process as what-is-happening for my co-researchers, at a deeper than surface level. This section I would properly qualify as the meat of my study since I am going to wind my way deeper, or leap into another realm, depending on how you view the process.

The themes provided me with valuable content that is useful in discussing Action Imperatives for the wilderness solo. The Process section is essentially my reflections as a fellow re-searcher, of the accumulated capta, ". . . not data, but capta, grasped rather than given" (Watts, 1972:5). Since the capta has so closely paralleled my own personal process thus far I will risk the next step, drawing on my own process I will reflect the other. You the reader are invited to decide for yourself if this is a reasonable depiction of the essence of the wilderness solo.

Suppose that

> four men approach an inaccessible mountain from different directions, and each writes a faithful description of the mountain as he sees it. Inevitably they will differ widely in detail and in opinion as to the best way to reach the summit, and although each account will be true as far as it goes, none will give a true picture of the mountain as a whole. But by putting the four accounts together, each taking from the others what it lacks, surely a much closer approximation to the whole will be achieved.
>
> The Paths are many but their End is One (Watts, 1972:vii).

Health and Healing

In view of my original intention, which was to explore the wilderness solo in light of its potential for healing, I must describe what I mean by healing.

An individual's health must be viewed in relation to all aspects of his/her existence.

> From the Greek Holos, meaning whole, holism is a modern term for the ancient theory that the universe, and especially living nature (e.g. plants and animals) is correctly understood as more than the sum of its parts (Bloomfield, 1977:Vol.1, No.1:10).

The individual is viewed qualitatively, in terms of the interaction between mind, body, spirit and environment. "Disease results from disharmony among these aspects of being" (Airola, 1971:176).

A holistic approach to health ". . . seeks to correct the underlying disharmony causing the problem" (Ferguson, 1976:246). This necessitates however, that we assume personal responsibility for our health because the key to harmony, well-being, lies within each of us.

> It originates in an attitude, an acceptance of life's uncertainties, a willingness to accept responsibility for habits, a way of perceiving and dealing with stress, more satisfying human relationships, a sense of purpose. . . . Only the individual can affect a healing from within (Ferguson, 1976:248, 276).

This demands a certain honesty and commitment to Self. Subsequently, ". . . the search for self becomes a search for health, for wholeness--the cache of sanity and wisdom that once seemed beyond our conscious reach" (Ferguson, 1976:242).

This search for inner wisdom is a slow process which may take a lifetime or more. It involves intense personal searching and a desire to achieve harmony.

> It is not a simple physical change but rather the state of mind that is the key to health . . . This state has been called 'restful alertness!' The secret is paying attention, investing your life with attention. Paying attention to stress in a relaxed state transforms it (Ferguson, 1976:250-251).

The wilderness solo provides the time and the environment in which to get away, to identify focal points of disharmony in our lives. It offers freedom from distractions. It offers simplicity, a chance to re-connect with our bodily rhythms and to tune-in to the greater rhythms of nature. It offers a change in our usual perspective of time, a slower more intuitive pace, spontaneous and creative expression. All of these combine to create a potentially healing experience.

Confronting Fears

There are other aspects of the solo experience that must not be overlooked. One of these phenomena relates to fear. In their own unique ways, each of the soloists confronted certain basic fears. These ranged from the clearly stated (e.g., fear of darkness, aloneness, and spiders) to the more subtle (e.g., fear of confronting the need for personal change and the lack of direction which accompanies a goal-less existence).

Moreno describes fear in two dimensions:

> The perception of an actual threat and the absence of symbols of security. . . The second type of fear is that in which the feeling of being threatened exists but where the actual threat is difficult to identify. . . . This kind of fear we can call nonspecific or unfocused fear. . . . it must be kept in mind, however, that our inability to limit this fear to a visible threat or danger does not make it any less real . . . Fear is our reaction to this unknown as well as to imaginary or actual danger.
>
> The usual reaction to the concept of nonspecific fear is confusion or avoidance (1977:3, 5).

He thinks that it is our ability to reason, our humanness, that creates nonspecific fears. In our ability to think . . .

> we see ourselves in relation to the cosmos, and we are aware of our ignorance and final powerlessness; hence our insecurity. . . . We try to ignore fear as much as we can because of our tendency to avoid pain and unpleasant experiences (1977:9, 10).

However, in our refusal to confront our (nonspecific) fears, it is difficult to maintain internal harmony and well-being.

> We must first learn to get past the psychological barriers . . . that prevent us from even trying. . . . Eventually we know deeply that the other side of every fear is a freedom. Finally, we must take charge of the journey, urging ourselves past our own reluctance and misgivings and confusion to new freedom.
>
> Once that happens, however many setbacks or detours we may encounter, we are on a different life journey (Ferguson, 1976:250, 294).

Moreno suggests that through faith we can transcend the immobilizing power of fear. "Faith is the psychological process through which we suspend, or override, our rational ability and accept non-rational answers to our questions concerning life" (1977:85).

First we must acknowledge that the fear exists. The expression of the fear allows for understanding that can eventually lead to acceptance and a letting-go. The existence of faith helps us through this process.

As we confront our fears we create a shift in our rational beliefs. The effect is like the swing of a pendulum. Without movement there is no growth. Without growth there is no life. Disharmony, pain and fear signal the need for inner search. A re-balancing.

> The pain is the aversion; the healing magic is attention (Ferguson, 1976:76).

> Our existence is the half-drama, half comedy of being caught somewhere between an instinctual beast and a rational god. We can neither stop reasoning nor be immune to basic fear. We stand on some metaphysical tightrope, desperately trying to keep our balance, not knowing how we got there and often pretending we are someplace else, but quite aware that we may fall at any moment (Moreno, 1977:95).

Transcending Fears: A Shift in Perspective

Each of the co-researchers embarked on a personal journey. As well as looking at fears, they questioned and re-evaluated personal beliefs and values. Issues concerning significant relationships accompanied a general inward search. Questions were asked such as: 'Where am I going? Is what I am doing now, best for me at this point in time?' Fantasies and dreams acted as guides for the future.

Their solos evolved as a time to go inward, a time for personal search.

The North American Natives believe that the Vision Quest or perceiving quest is the way to begin this search. According to their ancient traditions and spiritual beliefs, we are born with a predominant determining spirit which . . .

> can be made whole only through the learning of our harmony with all our brothers and sisters, and with all the other spirits of the universe. To do this we must learn to seek and to perceive. . . .

> We must all follow our Vision Quest to discover ourselves, to learn how we perceive of ourselves, and to find our relationship with the world around us (Storm, 1972:5).

This quest for wholeness or well-being is spawned by our need to feel a part of something greater than our individual selves. We yearn to connect, to contact other beings.

> According to the Teachers, there is only one thing that all people possess equally. This is their loneliness. . . . This is the cause of our Growing, but it is also the cause of our wars. . . . The only way that we can overcome our loneliness is through touching. It is only in this way that we can learn to be Total Beings. God is a presence of this Total (Storm, 1972:7).

The Role of Boredom

There is another very subtle, but powerful phenomenon occurring throughout this process of inward searching. Sitting alone for four days, with no distractions, one inevitably experiences boredom. For the co-researchers, this ennui seemed to follow a period of confronting fear (in whichever form). It appears that as soon as the soloists began to get comfortable, as they resolved issues that arose and became idle both physically and mentally, boredom set in. This boredom, preceded by restlessness is a potential turning-point in the solo. One can go to sleep, figuratively or literally, become distracted, leave or stay with it. If one chooses to stay with it, which will eventually happen unless the choice is made to leave, this inward search begins.

The Vacillating Spiral

This inward journey takes on a vacillating quality which eventually spirals its way deeper. The distractions of nature, the immediate

environment and creative forms of expression provide a balance to the heaviness which accompanies deep philosophical thought. This process resembles a type of inward-outward, back-and-forth movement. Depending on the individual and the circumstances at the time, the weather and time of day, the issues could remain superficial, or spiral their way to a greater intensity. Night-time dreams which addressed important personal issues and emotionally laden childhood memories, are an example of this spiralling intensity.

It is interesting to note that the soloists eventually reached a point of resolve or completion in their personal journeys. On the last day of their solos each of the co-researchers summarized what the time had meant to them. This became a time to review personal issues, to resolve them as best as possible and to make some decisions concerning the immediate future.

A Meditation

The solo process has a certain meditative quality about it. The soloists were free to do whatever they desired with their time. This time away from their normal agendas provided the opportunity to become absorbed in an action or a thought without interruption. The intention motivating the action, or non-action, reflected a deeply personal and potentially self-conscious choice.

In the words of Thoreau . . .

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite

> necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life . . . (1950:81)

Thoreau has eloquently described his desire to live life fully. To be responsible for his life, to live consciously, to be aware from moment to moment. He believes in simplicity and baulks at futile efforts to save time. He expresses his desire to allow each moment to unfold as it will and to be present for each of those moments.

> There were times when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or hands. I love a broad margin to my life. Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a revery, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house. . . . I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from life, but so much over and above my usual allowance. I realized what the orientals mean by contemplation and the forsaking of works (1950:101, 102).

> This idyllic description of solitude reflects an inner principle of Taoism ". . . spontaneity . . ." (Smullyan, 1977:52).

> When we learn to work with our Inner Nature, and with the natural laws operating around us, we reach the level of Wu Wei. Then we work with the natural order of things and operate on the principle of minimal effort (Hoff, 1982:69).

Solitude provides the opportunity to explore our own rhythms, to become absorbed in moment-to-moment action or non-action, with minimal effort. Movement allowed to unfold, to vacillate and to spiral with presence, attention and awareness, resembles a kind of worshipping the moment.

> For the first time he understood what meditation is--not that you sit for a special time and repeat a mantra, not that you go to the church or to the temple or to the mosque, but to be in life--to go on doing trivial things, but with such absorption that the profundity is revealed in every action. He could feel it. He could have touched it . . . (Rajneesh, 1983:71).

Intuition and Autonomy

This absorption in the moment takes on a special quality when conscious intention is initiated with grace and serenity. Movement originating from a state of relaxed alertness and purposefulness allows greater flexibility. It creates an . . .

> ability to deal with many complex ideas at the same time. Willingness to diverge from the prevailing view. Access to preconscious material. Seeing what is there rather than what is expected or conditioned . . . Like an artist, it spies pattern; it finds meaning and its own inescapable originality (Ferguson, 1976:116).

This type of movement requires that we give up our need for certainty. It means shedding our needs for structure and control in favor of trusting in the moment. This is similar to Moreno's notion of faith which was discussed earlier.

> Paradoxically, if we give up the need for certainty in terms of control and fixed answers, we are compensated by a different kind of certainty--a direction, not a fact. We begin to trust intuition (Ferguson, 1976:107).

As we learn to trust our intuition we develop a sixth sense that is essentially ". . . being sensitive to circumstance" (Hoff, 1982:85). As we learn to pay attention to inner signals we create the choice to respond with consciousness. Our actions reflect a . . .

> new kind of flexible will. . . . This will has sometimes been called 'intention.' It is the opposite of accident, it represents a certain deliberateness, but it doesn't have the iron quality we usually associate with the will. . . . The commitment is kind of mystical. The minute you begin to do what you want to do, it's really a different kind of life (Ferguson, 1976:108).

Re-Creation

The ability to respond with conscious intention to whatever life throws in our path develops a sense of flexible autonomy. It is a lifetime process to learn who we are and how we respond as unique individuals. Discovering what we have to offer as unique beings necessitates that we go ". . . beyond our compulsive, addictive behavior" and to "... pay attention to the unfocused questions inside us. Now we are asking, What matters?" (Ferguson, 1976:331).

This type of questioning requires a kind of removal or distancing from the usual embedded perceptions. To really know oneself one must be prepared to look behind automatic or unconscious reactions to everyday circumstances. In order to learn about a particular phenomenon one must view it from different angles. Similarly to discover one's own essence, one must view oneself from a different perspective. As Erwin Straus describes . . .

> To know, to attain to things as they are in themselves, I must break through this perspectival net. I must gain distance, dissolve the now, become identifiable with a universal order; that is, I must step forth, as it were, from the center into which I am placed and become a stranger to myself (1963:315).

To discover our uniqueness we must get to know who we are. To really get to know ourselves, we must become intimate with ourselves. This process engenders a certain kind of gentleness. Van Kaam describes gentleness as . . .

> an attitude of letting be, combined with a patient abiding with myself or with the person, task, or problem I am involved in. . . . Gentleness can become a lasting attitude, affecting or transferring one's personality (1983:94, 91).

As intimacy with another person develops from being alone with that person, so does intimacy with oneself develop from spending time alone with oneself.

> The first thing we must do is to accept aloneness as a basic fact and learn to live with it . . . if you can live with this fact, if there is no fiction between you and this fact, then the truth will be revealed to you. Every fact, if looked into, reveals the truth (Rajneesh, 1973:7).

The solo can be a time to confront our aloneness, to search for the truth. When we catch even a glimpse of this truth, we have a choice. Suddenly we see ourselves from a different angle, from a different perspective. We have a choice to remain entrenched in our usual cycle or to glimpse the beginning of it as we approach the end.

> The end of the cycle is that of the independent, clear-minded, all-seeing child. That is the level known as wisdom. When the Tao Te Ching and other wise books say things like 'Return to the beginning; become a child again,' that's what they're referring to. Why do the enlightened seem filled with light and happiness, like children? . . . Because they are. The wise are children who know. Their minds have been emptied of the countless minute somethings of small learning, and filled with the wisdom of the Great Nothing, the Way of the Universe (Hoff, 1982:151).

There is a point of 'nothingness' between the end and the beginning.

> When we are ready to see
> the approach
> of this nothingness,
> which is everything,
> we have the choice
> . . . to Re-Create . . .

ACTION IMPERATIVE

This final section relates to what I am choosing to call Action Imperative. These are reflections which become evident when considering the wilderness solo for therapeutic purposes. They are to be viewed in

context of the original intention and methodology of the study. The knowledge gained from the study, possible themes and process which emerged, is meant to spark a yearning for deeper understanding of how one is affected by being alone in the wilderness. A knowledge to which one is committed when viewing the wilderness solo as potentially therapeutic.

A common factor which existed for every co-researcher was the willingness or desire to be alone for three to four days in the outdoors. Everyone, in one way or another, viewed this as a personal challenge, something that they wanted to do. How would this experience differ if this element of choice was taken away? For instance, what is the experience of someone who is forced, either through peer pressure or program requirement to do a solo?

If confronting fears and delving into deep personal issues are a common phenomenon of the experience, then factors such as emotional stability of the soloist and availability of support are important considerations. Is it necessary to feel totally safe before exploring deep fears? What role does readiness play? How does one determine one's readiness to have this type of experience?

Is it important that the soloist determine his/her location and duration? How would a solo in the city, inside a building with no phones, radio or T.V., differ from a wilderness solo?

If one's experience was very trying as opposed to blissful, does this mean that the experience was not worthwhile or valuable? Which is more important, long- or short-term effects?

Assuming that the solo is potentially healing (a slowed down pace and a return to simplicity which enhances natural rhythms; freedom of expression; sense of accomplishment; and appreciation for existing relationships) would it be advisable to incorporate this into one's life on a regular basis? What of the person who has no one to go home to after a solo?

These are a few questions to consider--either as a participant or as a leader/therapist using the solo for the alleged benefit of the participant.

If one is a leader/therapist and the primary concern is to create a potentially healthful experience then safety is certainly a basic requirement. Safety, not only with respect to one's physical being, but also spiritually and emotionally.

The interview prior to the solo can be utilized to clarify the participants' expectations, fears, motives, levels of experience, etc. This initial contact with each person allows the leader to set safety margins s/he deems appropriate. For example, a person who has recently experienced the loss of a loved one may require the presence of a helper at some point during the solo. Critical issues may arise which require therapeutic intervention. If the leader feels a participant is emotionally unstable s/he may be discouraged from doing a solo, or the length of time shortened. A person who cannot swim should not be encouraged to do a canoe-solo.

As a result of being alone for an extended period of time in an unfamiliar environment, deep personal issues will inevitably arise for every soloist. The responsibilities of being a leader necessitate a 24-

hour/day commitment as well as a certain level of expertise/experience. The leader should be available for the soloists during and most certainly after the solo. In order to maximize the healing and re-creative dimensions, proper de-briefing is essential.

My bias, as a result of the study, is that the persons best qualified to enhance the healing potential within the solo, are those who have experienced it themselves. Those who have entered it with a clear recognition of their own expectations, biases and fears.

To tap another's uniqueness, one must tap
one's own
for without this,
where would be the recognition
of the shared
"SOUL"-I-TUDE.

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APPENDIX

SOLO

A Short Story By Arlen Green

LISA geared down for the battered Yield sign and noticed a farm--For Sale By Owner. Well, that would have been a better landmark than a sketch of pink roadside wildflowers on this stupid map. Let's see, gravel for two miles . . .

What a romp. Those kooky punkband pals of hers were always pulling stunts. It was dangerously close to her 29th birthday so it had to be a big double-O-seven surprise, but forty miles! And her poor muffler! Franky's getting revenge for turning all her furniture upside down last weekend. What a crazy bunch! But they sure were fun.

I wonder how the hell they got this map so old looking and--warm. Jeez Louise it's almost creepy. Marsha got that part time job at Zippy Print so it's probably a new finisher chemical she ripped off.

The little red car groaned its way along narrower and wilder paths, dirt roads, and a grass trail. This is nutzoid! Lisa got out. Wow . . . I'm--nowhere. The landscape was green and consistent. It's pretty. Wild rose country.

She followed a trail, the brambles prickling softly but incessantly and came to a campsite in a tiny meadow. A teepee! Hey, right arm! Franky's uncle is a weird mountain climbing guy, this must be his place. ROCKABILLY BOOGIE! Her voice sounded loud and foreign. Lisa wished she hadn't yelled. The game was not over at all. This was getting a little spooky, no one around, a sign of recent life like smoke or food. She poked her head inside the teepee--hmm, organic.

Okay, okay, there has to be a clue. The map leads Here and then stops. So . . . here's another trail, maybe, maybe this isn't a birthday surprise. The trail led steeply to a ridge that overlooked more of the same green consistent landscape that was so unfamiliar to Lisa's urban eye. Two rickety green lawn chairs were at the top of the ridge. A lookout with stump stools. In one of the green lawn chairs sat a woman, Lisa's age. The woman was looking intently at her. She held a barkpeeled stick in her hand and used it to motion Lisa to the second chair.

Careful, it's broken.

Lisa started. That voice was so familiar! Damn, who's was it?

The other woman smiled. Maybe she was a bit older than Lisa, those lines around her eyes. No that was just her remarkable tan.

The woman got up and walked to the edge of the ridge. Lisa thought for an instant that she had been sleeping, one of those fitful sleeps that you wake from with a sudden cold awareness.

The other woman was contemplating, she was going to say something, the other woman leaned forward and tumbled over the ridge. Lisa watched for a second or two as now only the green consistent landscape filled her vision.

Oh my God! Oh God! Oh SHIT! She scrambled down the ridge's edge, she lost hold, grabbed a branch, it gave way, she gained her balance, she GODDAMN fell the rest of the way and landed face first in a patch of sweet clover. A bee inspected her and flew off.

Ow . . . She was scratched and her shin hurt and her neck too . . . a little bit. She looked for the other woman. She looked for the

woman. She looked for twenty minutes. She wasn't there. Only the green consistent unassuming landscape was there. Had been there. Would be there when she left.

Lisa almost started crying. She stared wildly at the green leafy panorama. it was scary. So much of it.

Racing up the hill, cursing, trampling rose bushes . . . she paused at the top, heaving. Only the green consistent unassuming leafy— She raced back down the steep path, GODDAMN there was no teepee!

There's nothing there! She ran, panting and coughing to her little red car.

And stopped one last time to look back. There's nothing there.

So what am I afraid of?

Nothing?